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THE

BORDERERS:

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE SPY," "THE RED ROVER," "THE PRAIRIE,"

&c. &c. &c.

Cooper, James Fenimore

" But she is dead to him, to all ;
Her lute hangs silent on the wall,
And on the stairs, and at the door,
Her fairy step is heard no more."

ROGERS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

HENRY COLBURN AND RICHARD BENTLEY,

NEW BURLINGTON-STREET.

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LONDON:

SHACKELL AND BAYLIS, JOHNSON'S-COURT, FLEET-STREET.

TO
THE REV. J. R. C.
OF
* * * PENNSYLVANIA.

THE kind and disinterested manner in which you have furnished the materials of the following tale, merits a public acknowledgment. As your reluctance to appear before the world, however, imposes a restraint, you must receive such evidence of gratitude, as your own prohibition will allow.

Notwithstanding there are so many striking and deeply interesting events in the early history of those from whom you derive your

being, yet are there hundreds of other families in this country, whose traditions, though less accurately and minutely preserved than the little narrative you have submitted to my inspection, would supply the materials of many moving tales. You have every reason to exult in your descent, for, surely, if any man may claim to be a citizen and a proprietor in the Union, it is one, that, like yourself, can point to a line of ancestors whose origin is lost in the obscurity of time. You are truly an American. In your eyes, we of a brief century, or two, must appear as little more than denizens quite recently admitted to the privilege of a residence. That you may continue to enjoy peace and happiness, in that land where your fathers so long flourished, is the sincere wish of your obliged friend,

THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E.

AT this distant period, when Indian traditions are listened to with the interest that we lend to the events of a dark age, it is not easy to convey a vivid image of the dangers and privations that our ancestors encountered, in preparing the land we enjoy for its present state of security and abundance. It is the humble object of the tale that will be found in the succeeding pages, to perpetuate the recollection of some of the practices and events peculiar to the early days of our history.

The general character of the warfare pursued by the natives, is too well known to require any preliminary observations; but it may be advisable to direct the attention of the reader, for a few moments, to those leading circum-

stances in the history of the times, that may have some connexion with the principal business of the legend.

The territory which now composes the three states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode-Island, is said, by the best-informed of our annalists, to have been formerly occupied by four great nations of Indians, who were, as usual, subdivided into numberless dependent tribes. Of these people, the Massachusetts possessed a large portion of the land which now composes the state of that name; the Wampanoags dwelt in what was once the Colony of Plymouth, and in the northern districts of the Providence Plantations; the Narragansetts held the well-known islands of the beautiful bay which receives its name from their nation, and the more southern counties of the Plantations; while the Pequots, or, as it is ordinarily written and pronounced, the Pequods, were masters of a broad region that lay along the western boundaries of the three other districts

There is great obscurity thrown around the polity of the Indians, who originally occupied the country lying near the sea.

The Europeans, accustomed to despotic governments, very naturally supposed that the chiefs found in possession of power, were monarchs to whom authority had been transmitted in virtue of their birth-rights. They consequently gave them the name of kings.

How far this opinion of the governments of the aborigines was true, remains a question: though there is certainly reason to think it less erroneous in respect to the tribes of the Atlantic states, than to those who have since been found further west, where, it is sufficiently known, that institutions exist which approach much nearer to republics than to monarchies. It may however have readily happened, that the son, profiting by the advantages of his situation, often succeeded to the authority of the father, by the aid of influence, when the established regulations of the tribe acknowledged no hereditary claim. Let the principle of the descent of power be what it would, it is certain the

experience of our ancestors proves, that, in very many instances, the child was seen to occupy the station formerly filled by the father, and that, in most of those situations of emergency in which a people so violent were often placed, the authority he exercised was as summary as it was general. The appellation of Uncas came, like those of the Cæsars and Pharaohs, to be a sort of synonyme for chief with the Mohegans, a tribe of the Pequods, among whom several warriors of this name were known to govern in due succession. The renowned Metacom, or, as he is better known to the whites, King Philip, was certainly the son of Massassoit, the Sachem of the Wampanoags that the emigrants found in authority when they landed on the rock of Plymouth. Miantonimoh, the daring but hapless rival of that Uncas who ruled the whole of the Pequod nation, was succeeded in authority, among the Narragansetts, by his not less heroic and enterprising son, Conanchet ; and, even at a much later day, we find instances of this transmission of power, which furnish strong reasons for

believing that the order of succession was in the direct line of blood.

The early annals of our history are not wanting in touching and noble examples of savage heroism. Virginia has its legend of the powerful Powhattan, and his magnanimous daughter, the ill requited Pocahontas; and the chronicles of New England are filled with the bold designs and daring enterprises of Miantonimoh, of Metacom, and of Conanchet. All the last named warriors proved themselves worthy of better fates, dying in a cause and in a manner, that, had it been their fortunes to have lived in a more advanced state of society, would have enrolled their names among the worthies of the age.

The first serious war to which the settlers of New England were exposed, was the struggle with the Pequods. This people were subdued after a fierce conflict; and from being enemies, all who were not either slain or sent into distant slavery, were glad to become the auxiliaries of their conquerors. This contest occurred within less than twenty years after the puritans had sought refuge in America

There is reason to believe that Metacom foresaw the fate of his own people, in the humbled fortunes of the Pequods. Though his father had been the earliest and constant friend of the whites, it is probable that the puritans owed some portion of this amity to a dire necessity. We are told, that a terrible malady had raged among the Wampanoags but a short time before the arrival of the emigrants, and that their numbers had been fearfully reduced by its ravages. Some authors have hinted at the probability of this disease having been the yellow fever, whose visitations are known to be at uncertain, and, apparently, at very distant intervals. Whatever might have been the cause of this destruction of his people, Massasoit is believed to have been induced by the consequences, to cultivate the alliance of a nation who could protect him against the attacks of his ancient and less afflicted foes. But the son appears to have viewed the increasing influence of the whites, with eyes more jealous than those of the father. He passed the morning of his life in maturing his great

plan for the destruction of the strange race, and his later years were spent in abortive attempts to put this bold design in execution. His restless activity in plotting the confederation against the English, his fierce and ruthless manner of waging the war, his defeat, and his death, are too well known to require repetition.

There is also a wild and romantic interest thrown about the obscure history of a Frenchman of that period. This man is said to have been an officer of rank in the service of his king, and to have belonged to the privileged class which then monopolized all the dignities and emoluments of the kingdom of France. The traditions, and even the written annals of the first century of our possession of America, connect the Baron de la Castine with the Jesuits, who were thought to entertain views of converting the savages to Christianity, not unmingled with the desire of establishing a more temporal dominion over their minds. It is, however, difficult to say, whether taste, or religion, or policy, or necessity, induced this nobleman to quit the salons of Paris for the

wilds of the Penobscot. It is merely known, that he passed the greater part of his life on that river, in a rude fortress that was then called a palace, that he had many wives, a numerous progeny, and that he possessed a great influence over most of the tribes that dwelt in his vicinity. He is also believed to have been the instrument of furnishing the savages, who were hostile to the English, with ammunition, and with weapons of a more deadly character than those used in their earlier wars. In whatever degree he may have participated in the plan to exterminate the puritans, death prevented him from assisting in the final effort of Metacom.

The Narragansetts are often mentioned in these pages. A few years before the period at which the tale commences, Miantonimoh had waged a ruthless war against Uncas, the Pequod or Mohegan chief. Fortune favoured the latter, who, probably assisted by his civilized allies, not only overthrew the bands of the other, but succeeded in capturing the person of his enemy. The chief of the Narra-

gansetts lost his life, through the agency of the whites, on the place that is now known by the appellation of "The Sachem's Plain."

It remains only to throw a little light on the leading incidents of the war of King Philip. The first blow was struck in June 1675, rather more than half a century after the English first landed in New England, and just a century before blood was drawn in the contest which separated the colonies from the mother country. The scene was a settlement near the celebrated Mount Hope, in Rhode Island, where Metacom and his father had both long held their councils. From this point, bloodshed and massacre extended along the whole frontier of New England. Bodies of horse and foot were enrolled to meet the foe, and towns were burnt, and lives were taken by both parties, with little, and often with no respect for age, condition, or sex.

In no struggle with the native owners of the soil, was the growing power of the whites placed in so great jeopardy, as in this celebrated contest with King Philip. The venerable his-

torian of Connecticut estimates the loss of lives at nearly one tenth of the whole number of the fighting men, and the destruction of houses and other edifices, to have been in an equal proportion. One family in every eleven, throughout all New England, was burnt out. As the colonists nearest the sea were exempt from the danger, an idea may be formed, from this calculation, of the risk and sufferings of those who dwelt in more exposed situations. The Indians did not escape without retaliation. The principal nations, already mentioned, were so much reduced as never afterwards to offer any serious resistance to the whites, who have since converted the whole of their ancient hunting grounds into the abodes of civilized man. Metacom, Miantonimoh, and Conanchet, with their warriors, have become the heroes of song and legend ; while the descendants of those who laid waste their dominions and destroyed their race, are yielding a tardy tribute to the high daring and savage grandeur of their characters.

THE BORDERERS ;

OR,

THE WEPT OF WISH-TON-WISH.

CHAPTER I

“ I may disjoin my hand, but not my faith.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE incidents of this tale must be sought in a remote period of the annals of America. A colony of self-devoted and pious refugees from religious persecution had landed on the rock of Plymouth, less than half a century be-

fore the time at which the narrative commences ; and they, and their descendants, had already transformed many a broad waste of wilderness into smiling fields and cheerful villages. The labours of the emigrants had been chiefly limited to the country on the coast, which, by its proximity to the waters that rolled between them and Europe, afforded the semblance of a connexion with the land of their forefathers and the distant abodes of civilization. But enterprise and a desire to search for still more fertile domains, together with the temptation offered by the vast and unknown regions that lay along their western and northern borders, had induced many bold adventurers to penetrate more deeply into the forests. The precise spot to which we desire to transport the imagination of the reader, was one of these establishments of what may, not inaptly, be called the forlorn hope, in the march of civilization through the country.

So little was then known of the great outlines of the American continent, that, when the

Lords Say and Seal, and Brooke, connected with a few associates, obtained a grant of the territory which now composes the state of Connecticut, the King of England affixed his name to a patent, which constituted them proprietors of a country that should extend from the shores of the Atlantic to those of the South Sea. Notwithstanding the apparent hopelessness of ever subduing, or of even occupying a territory like this, emigrants from the mother colony of Massachusetts were found ready to commence the Herculean labour, within fifteen years from the day when they had first put foot upon the well known rock itself. The fort of Say-Brooke, the towns of Windsor, Hartford, and New Haven, soon sprang into existence, and, from that period to this, the little community, which then had birth, has been steadily, calmly, and prosperously advancing in its career, a model of order and reason, and the hive from which swarms of industrious, hardy, and enlightened yeomen

have since spread themselves over a surface so vast, as to create an impression that they still aspire to the possession of the immense regions included in their original grant.

Among the religionists, whom disgust or persecution had early driven into the voluntary exile of the colonies, was more than an usual proportion of men of character and education. The reckless and the gay, younger sons, soldiers unemployed, and students from the inns of court, early sought advancement and adventure in the more southern provinces, where slaves offered impunity from labour, and where war, with a bolder and more stirring policy, oftener gave rise to scenes of excitement, and of course, to the exercise of the faculties best suited to their habits and dispositions. The more grave, and the religiously disposed, found refuge in the colonies of New England. Thither a multitude of private gentlemen transferred their fortunes and their families, imparting a character of intelligence

and a moral elevation to the country, which it has nobly sustained to the present hour.

The nature of the civil wars in England had enlisted many men of deep and sincere piety in the profession of arms. Some of them had retired to the colonies before the troubles of the mother country reached their crisis, and others continued to arrive, throughout the whole period of their existence, until the restoration; when crowds of those who had been disaffected to the house of Stuart sought the security of these distant possessions.

A stern, fanatical soldier, of the name of Heathcote, had been among the first of his class, to throw aside the sword for the implements of industry peculiar to the advancement of a newly established country. How far the influence of a young wife may have affected his decision it is not germane to our present object to consider, though the records, from which the matter we are about to relate is gleaned, give reason to suspect that he thought

his domestic harmony would not be less secure in the wilds of the new world, than among the companions with whom his earlier associations would naturally have brought him in communion.

Like himself, his consort was born of one of those families, which, taking their rise in the Franklins of the times of the Edwards and Henrys, had become possessors of hereditary landed estates, that, by their gradually increasing value, had elevated them to the station of small country gentlemen. In most other nations of Europe they would have been rated in the class of the *petite noblesse*. But the domestic happiness of Captain Heathcote was doomed to receive a fatal blow, from a quarter where circumstances had given him but little reason to apprehend danger. The very day he landed in the long-wished-for asylum, his wife made him the father of a noble boy, a gift that she bestowed at the melancholy price of her own existence. Twenty years the senior

of the woman who had followed his fortunes to these distant regions, the retired warrior had always considered it to be perfectly and absolutely within the order of things, that he himself was to be the first to pay the debt of nature. While the visions which Captain Heathcote entertained of a future world were sufficiently vivid and distinct, there is reason to think they were seen through a tolerably long vista of quiet and comfortable enjoyment in this. Though the calamity cast an additional aspect of seriousness over a character that was already more than chastened by the subtleties of sectarian doctrines, he was not of a nature to be unmanned by any vicissitude of human fortune. He lived on, useful and unbending in his habits, a pillar of strength in the way of wisdom and courage to the immediate neighbourhood among whom he resided, but reluctant from temper, and from a disposition which had been shadowed by withered happiness, to enact that part in the

public affairs of the little state, to which his comparative wealth and previous habits might well have entitled him to aspire. He gave his son such an education as his own resources and those of the infant colony of Massachusetts afforded ; and, by a sort of delusive piety, into whose merits we have no desire to look, he thought he had also furnished a commendable evidence of his own desperate resignation to the will of Providence, in causing him to be publicly christened by the name of Content. His own baptismal appellation was Mark ; as indeed had been that of most of his ancestors, for two or three centuries. When the world was a little uppermost in his thoughts, as sometimes happens with the most humbled spirits, he had even been heard to speak of a Sir Mark of his family, who had ridden a knight in the train of one of the more warlike kings of his native land.

There is some ground for believing, that the great parent of evil early looked with

a malignant eye on the example of peacefulness, and of unbending morality that the colonists of New England were setting to the rest of Christendom. At any rate, come from what quarter they might, schisms and doctrinal contentions arose among the emigrants themselves; and men, who together had deserted the fire-sides of their forefathers in quest of religious peace, were ere long seen separating their fortunes, in order that each might enjoy, unmolested, those peculiar shades of faith, which all had the presumption, no less than the folly, to believe were necessary to propitiate the omnipotent and merciful Father of the universe. If our task were one of theology, a wholesome moral on the vanity, no less than on the absurdity of the race, might be here introduced to some advantage.

When Mark Heathcote announced to the community, in which he had now sojourned more than twenty years, that he intended for a second time to establish his altars in the wilderness, in

the hope that he and his household might worship God as to them seemed most right, the intelligence was received with a feeling allied to awe. Doctrine and zeal were momentarily forgotten in the respect and attachment which had been unconsciously created by the united influence of the stern severity of his air, and of the undeniable virtues of his practice. The elders of the settlement communed with him freely and in charity; but the voice of conciliation and alliance came too late. He listened to the reasonings of the ministers, who were assembled from all the adjoining parishes, in sullen respect; and he joined in the petitions for light and instruction, that were offered up on the occasion, with the deep reverence with which he ever drew near to the footstool of the Almighty; but he did both in a temper into which too much positiveness of spiritual pride had entered, to open his heart to that sympathy and charity, which, as they are the characteristics of our mild and forbearing doctrines, should be the study of those who

profess to follow their precepts. All that was seemly, and all that was usual, were done ; but the purpose of the stubborn sectarian remained unchanged. His final decision is worthy of being recorded.

“ My youth was wasted in ungodliness and ignorance,” he said, “ but in my manhood have I known the Lord. Near two score years have I toiled for the truth, and all that weary time have I passed in trimming my lamps, lest, like the foolish virgins, I should be caught unprepared ; and now, when my loins are girded and my race is nearly run, shall I become a backslider and falsifier of the word ! Much have I endured, as you know, in quitting the earthly mansion of my fathers, and in encountering the dangers of sea and land for the faith ; and rather than let go its hold, will I once more cheerfully devote to the howling wilderness, ease, offspring, and, should it be the will of Providence, life itself !”

The day of parting was one of unfeigned and general sorrow. Notwithstanding the austerity

of the old man's character, and the nearly unbending severity of his brow, the milk of human kindness had often been seen distilling from his stern nature in acts that did not admit of misinterpretation. There was scarcely a young beginner in the laborious and ill requited husbandry of the township he inhabited, a district at no time considered either profitable or fertile, who could not recal some secret and kind aid which had flowed from a hand that, to the world, seemed clenched in cautious and reserved frugality; nor did any of the faithful of his vicinity cast their fortunes together in wedlock, without receiving from him evidences of an interest in their worldly happiness, that was far more substantial than words.

On the morning when the vehicles, groaning with the household goods of Mark Heathcote, were seen quitting his door and taking the road which led to the sea-side, not a human being of sufficient age, within many miles of his residence, was absent from the interesting spectacle. The

leave-taking, as usual on all serious occasions, was preceded by a hymn and prayer, and then the sternly-minded adventurer embraced his neighbours with a mien, in which a subdued exterior struggled fearfully and strangely with emotions that, more than once, threatened to break through even the formidable barriers of his acquired manner. The inhabitants of every building on the road were in the open air, to receive and to return the parting benediction. More than once they, who guided his teams, were commanded to halt, and all near, possessing human aspirations and human responsibility, were collected to offer petitions in favour of him who departed, and of those who remained. The requests for mortal privileges were somewhat light and hasty, but the askings in behalf of intellectual and spiritual light were long, fervent, and oft repeated. In this characteristic manner did one of the first of the emigrants to the new world make his second removal into scenes of renewed bodily suffering, privation and danger.

Neither person nor property was transferred, from place to place, in this country, at the middle of the seventeenth century, with the despatch and with the facilities of the present time. The roads were necessarily few and short, and communication by water was irregular, tardy, and far from commodious. A wide barrier of forest, lying between that portion of Massachusetts Bay from which Mark Heathcote emigrated, and the spot, near the Connecticut river, to which it was his intention to proceed, he was induced to adopt the latter mode of conveyance. But a long delay intervened between the time when he commenced his short journey to the coast, and the hour when he was finally enabled to embark. During this detention, he and his household sojourned among the godly-minded of the narrow peninsula, where there already existed the germ of a flourishing town, and where the spires of a noble and picturesque city now elevate themselves above so many thousand roofs.

The son did not leave the colony of his birth and the haunts of his youth, with the same unwavering obedience to the call of duty, as the father. There was a fair, a youthful, and a gentle being in the recently established town of Boston, of an age, station, opinions, fortunes, and, what was of still greater importance, of sympathies suited to his own. Her form had long mingled with those holy images, which his stern instruction taught him to keep most familiarly before the mirror of his thoughts. It is not surprising, then, that the youth hailed the delay as propitious to his wishes, or that he turned it to the account which the promptings of a pure affection so naturally suggested. He was united to the gentle Ruth Harding, only the week before the father sailed on his second pilgrimage.

It is not our intention to dwell on the incidents of the voyage. Though the genius of an extraordinary man had discovered the world which was now beginning to fill with civilized

men, navigation at that day was not brilliant in accomplishments. A passage among the shoals of Nantucket must have been one of actual danger, no less than of terror; and the ascent of the Connecticut itself was an exploit worthy of being mentioned. In due time the adventurers landed at the English fort of Hartford, where they tarried for a season, in order to obtain rest and spiritual comfort. But the peculiarity of doctrine, on which Mark Heathcote laid so much stress, was one that rendered it advisable for him to retire still further from the haunts of men. Accompanied by a few followers, he proceeded on an exploring expedition, and the end of the summer found him once more established on an estate that he had acquired by the usual simple forms practised in the colonies, and at the trifling cost for which extensive districts were then set apart as the property of individuals.

The love of the things of this life, while it certainly existed, was far from being pre-

dominant in the affections of the puritan. He was frugal from habit and principle, more than from an undue longing after worldly wealth. He contented himself, therefore, with acquiring an estate that should be valuable, rather from its quality and beauty, than from its extent. Many such places offered themselves, between the settlements of Weathersfield and Hartford, and that imaginary line which separated the possessions of the colony he had quitted from those of the one he joined. He made his location, as it is termed in the language of the country, near the northern boundary of the latter. This spot, by the aid of an expenditure that might have been considered lavish for the country and the age, of some lingering of taste, which even the self-denying and subdued habits of his later life had not entirely extinguished, and of great natural beauty in the distribution of land, water, and wood, the emigrant contrived to convert into an abode, that was not more desirable for its

retirement from the temptations of the world, than for its rural loveliness.

After this memorable act of conscientious self-devotion, years passed away in quiet, amid a species of negative prosperity. Rumours from the old world reached the ears of the tenants of this secluded settlement, months after the events to which they referred were elsewhere forgotten, and tumults and wars in the sister colonies came to their knowledge, only at distant and tardy intervals. In the mean time, the limits of the colonial establishments were gradually extending themselves, and valleys were beginning to be cleared nearer and nearer to their own. Old age had now begun to make some visible impression on the iron frame of the captain, and the fresh colour of youth and health, with which his son had entered the forest, was giving way to the brown covering produced by exposure and toil. We say of toil, for, independently of the habits and opinions of the country, which strongly repro-

bated idleness, even in those most gifted by fortune, the daily difficulties of their situation, the chase, and the long and intricate passages that the veteran himself was compelled to adventure in the surrounding forest, partook largely of the nature of the term we have used. Ruth continued blooming and youthful, though maternal anxiety was soon added to her other causes of care. Still, for a long season, nought occurred to excite extraordinary regrets for the step they had taken, or to create particular uneasiness in behalf of the future. The borderers, for such by their frontier position they had in truth become, heard the strange and awful tidings of the dethronement of one king, of the interregnum, as a reign of more than usual vigour and prosperity is called, and of the restoration of the son of him who is strangely enough termed a martyr. To all these eventful and unwonted chances in the fortunes of kings, Mark Heathcote listened with deep and reverential submission to the will of Him, in whose

eyes crowns and sceptres are merely the more costly baubles of the world. Like most of his contemporaries, who had sought shelter in the western continent, his political opinions, if not absolutely republican, had a leaning to liberty that was strongly in opposition to the doctrine of the divine rights of the monarch, while he had been too far removed from the stirring passions which had gradually excited those nearer to the throne, to lose their respect for its sanctity, and to sully its brightness with blood. When the transient and straggling visitors that, at long intervals, visited his settlement, spoke of the Protector, who for so many years ruled England with an iron hand, the eyes of the old man would gleam with sudden and singular interest; and once, when commenting, after evening prayer, on the vanity and the vicissitudes of this life, he acknowledged that the extraordinary individual, who was, in substance, if not in name, seated on the throne of the Plantagenets, had been the boon com-

panion and ungodly associate of many of his youthful hours. Then would follow a long, wholesome, extemporaneous homily on the idleness of setting the affections on the things of life, and a half-suppressed, but still intelligible commendation of the wiser course which had led him to raise his own tabernacle in the wilderness, instead of weakening the chances of eternal glory by striving too much for the possession of the treacherous vanities of the world.

But even the gentle and ordinarily little observant Ruth, might trace the kindling of the eye, the knitting of the brow, and the flushings of his pale and furrowed cheek, as the murderous conflicts of the civil wars became the themes of the ancient soldier's discourse. There were moments when religious submission, and, we had almost said, religious precepts, were partially forgotten, as he explained to his attentive son and listening grandchild, the nature of the onset, or the quality and dignity of the retreat.

At such times, his still nervous hand would even wield the blade, in order to instruct the latter in its uses, and many a long wintry evening was passed in thus indirectly teaching an art, that was so much at variance with the mandates of his Divine Master. The chastened soldier, however, never forgot to close his instruction with a petition extraordinary, in the customary prayer, that no descendant of his should ever take life from a being unprepared to die, except in justifiable defence of his faith, his person, or his lawful rights. It must be admitted, that a liberal construction of the reserved privileges would leave sufficient matter to exercise the subtlety of one subject to any extraordinary propensity to arms.

Few opportunities were, however, offered, in their remote situation and peaceful habits, for the practice of a theory that had been taught in so many lessons. Indian alarms, as they were termed, were not unfrequent; but as yet they had never produced more than terror in the

bosoms of the gentle Ruth and her young offspring. It is true, they had heard of travellers massacred, and of families separated by captivity ; but, either by a happy fortune, or by more than ordinary prudence in the settlers who were established along that immediate frontier, the knife and the tomahawk had as yet been sparingly used in the colony of Connecticut. A threatening and dangerous struggle with the Dutch, in the adjoining province of New Netherlands, had been averted by the foresight and moderation of the rulers of the new plantations ; and though a warlike and powerful native chief kept the neighbouring colonies of Massachusetts and Rhode Island in a state of constant watchfulness, from the cause just mentioned the apprehension of danger was greatly weakened in the breasts of those so remote as the individuals who composed the family of our emigrant.

In this quiet manner did years glide by, the surrounding wilderness slowly retreating from

the habitations of the Heathcotes, until they found themselves in the possession of as many of the comforts of life as their utter seclusion from the rest of the world could give them reason to expect.

With this preliminary explanation, we shall refer the reader to the succeeding narrative for a more minute, and, we hope, for a more interesting account of the incidents of a legend that may prove too homely for the tastes of those whose imaginations seek the excitement of scenes more stirring, or of a condition of life less natural.

CHAPTER II.

“ Sir, I do know you ;
And dare, upon the warrant of my art,
Commend a dear thing to you.”

King Lear.

AT the precise time when the action of our piece commences, a fine and fruitful season was drawing to a close. The harvests of the hay, and of the smaller corns, had long been over, and the younger Heathcote, with his labourers, had passed a day in depriving the luxuriant maize of its tops, in order to secure the nutritious

blades for fodder, and to admit the sun and air to harden a grain that is almost considered the staple production of the region he inhabited. The veteran Mark had ridden among the workmen, during their light toil, as well to enjoy a sight which promised abundance to his flocks and herds, as to throw in, on occasion, some wholesome spiritual precept, in which doctrinal subtlety was far more prominent than the rules of practice. The hirelings of his son, for he had long since yielded the management of the estate to Content, were, without an exception, young men born in the country, and long use and much training had accustomed them to a blending of religious exercises with most of the employments of life. They listened, therefore, with respect; nor did an impious smile, or an impatient glance, escape the lightest-minded of their number during his exhortations, though the homilies of the old man were neither very brief nor particularly original. But devotion to the one great cause of their existence—austere habits, and unrelaxed in-

dustry, in keeping alive a flame of zeal that had been kindled in the other hemisphere, to burn longest and brightest in this—had interwoven the practice mentioned with most of the opinions and pleasures of these metaphysical, though simple-minded people. The toil went on none the less cheerily for the extraordinary accompaniment; and Content himself, by a certain glimmering of superstition, which appears to be the concomitant of excessive religious zeal, was fain to think that the sun shone more brightly on their labours, and that the earth gave forth more of its fruits, while these holy sentiments were flowing from the lips of a father, whom he piously loved, and deeply revered.

But when the sun, usually at that season, in the climate of Connecticut, a bright unshrouded orb, fell towards the tree-tops which bounded the western horizon, the old man began to grow weary with his own well-doing. He therefore finished his discourse with a wholesome admonition to the youths to complete their tasks before

they quitted the field, and, turning the head of his horse, he rode slowly, and with a musing air, towards the dwellings. It is probable that, for some time, the thoughts of Mark were occupied with the intellectual matter he had just been handling with so much power; but when his little nag stopped of itself on a small eminence, which the crooked cow-path he was following crossed, his mind yielded to the impression of more worldly and more sensible objects. As the scene that drew his contemplations from so many abstract theories to the realities of life was peculiar to the country, and is more or less connected with the subject of our tale, we shall endeavour briefly to describe it.

A small tributary of the Connecticut divided the view into two nearly equal parts. The fertile flats, that extended on each of its banks for more than a mile, had been early stripped of their burthen of forests; and they now lay in placid meadows, or in fields, from which the grain of the season had lately disappeared, and over which

the plough had already left the marks of recent tillage. The whole of the plain, which ascended gently from the rivulet towards the forest, was subdivided in enclosures by numberless fences, constructed in the rude but substantial manner of the country. Rails, in which lightness and economy of wood had been but little consulted, lying in zig-zag lines, like the approaches which the besieger makes in his cautious advance to the hostile fortress, were piled on each other, until barriers seven or eight feet in height were interposed to the inroads of vicious cattle. In one spot, a large square vacancy had been cut into the forest; and though numberless stumps of trees darkened its surface, as, indeed, they did many of the fields, on the flats themselves bright green grain was sprouting forth luxuriantly from the rich and virgin soil. High against the side of an adjacent hill, that might aspire to be called a low rocky mountain, a similar invasion had been made on the dominion of the trees; but caprice or convenience had induced an abandon-

ment of the clearing, after it had ill requited the toil of felling the timber by a single crop. In this spot, straggling, girdled, and consequently dead trees, piles of logs, and black and charred stubbs, were seen deforming the beauty of a field, that would, otherwise, have been striking from its deep setting in the woods. Much of the surface of this opening, too, was now concealed by bushes, of what is termed the second growth; though, here and there, places appeared in which the luxuriant white clover, natural to the country, had followed the close grazing of the flocks. The eyes of Mark were bent inquiringly on this clearing, which, by an air line, might have been half a mile from the place where his horse had stopped, for the sounds of a dozen differently toned cow-bells were brought, on the still air of the evening, to his ears, from among its bushes.

The evidences of civilization were the least equivocal, however, on and around a natural elevation in the land, which arose so suddenly on the very bank of the stream, as to give to it

the appearance of a work of art. Whether these mounds once existed everywhere on the face of the earth, and have disappeared before long tillage and labour, we shall not presume to conjecture, but we have reason to think that they occur much more frequently in certain parts of our own country, than in any other familiarly known to ordinary travellers ; unless perhaps it may be in some of the valleys of Switzerland. The practised veteran had chosen the summit of this flattened cone for the establishment of that species of military defence, which the situation of the country, and the character of the enemy he had to guard against, rendered advisable, as well as customary.

The dwelling was of wood, and constructed of the ordinary frame-work, with its thin covering of boards. It was long, low, and irregular ; bearing marks of having been reared at different periods, as the wants of an increasing family had required additional accommodation. It stood near the verge of the natural declivity,

and on that side of the hill where its base was washed by the rivulet, a rude piazza stretching along the whole of its front and overhanging the stream. Several large, irregular, and clumsy chimneys, rose out of different parts of the roofs, another proof that comfort, rather than taste, had been consulted in the disposition of the buildings. There were also two or three detached offices on the summit of the hill, placed near the dwellings, and at points most convenient for their several uses. A stranger might have remarked that they were so disposed as to form, far as they went, the different sides of a hollow square. Notwithstanding the great length of the principal building and the disposition of the more minute and detached parts, this desirable formation would not, however, have been obtained, were it not that two rows of rude constructions in logs, from which the bark had not even been stripped, served to eke out the parts that were deficient. These primeval edifices were used to contain various

domestic articles, no less than provisions; and they also furnished numerous lodging rooms for the labourers and the inferior dependants of the farm. By the aid of a few strong and high gates of hewn timber, those parts of the buildings which had not been made to unite in the original construction, were sufficiently connected to oppose so many barriers against admission into the inner court.

But the building which was most conspicuous, by its position, no less than by the singularity of its construction, stood on a low, artificial mound in the centre of the quadrangle. It was high, hexagonal in shape, and crowned with a roof that came to a point, and from whose peak rose a towering flag-staff. The foundation was of stone; but, at the height of a man above the earth, the sides were made of massive squared logs, firmly united by an ingenious combination of their ends, as well as by perpendicular supporters, pinned closely into their sides. In this citadel, or block-house, as from its materials it

was technically called, there were two different tiers of long, narrow loop-holes, but no regular windows. The rays of the setting sun, however, glittered on one or two small openings in the roof, in which glass had been set, furnishing evidence that the summit of the building was sometimes used for other purposes than those of defence.

About half-way up the sides of the eminence on which the dwelling stood, was an unbroken line of high palisadoes, made of the bodies of young trees, firmly knit together by braces and horizontal pieces of timber, and evidently kept in a state of jealous and complete repair. The air of the whole of this frontier fortress was neat and comfortable, and, considering that the use of artillery was unknown to those forests, not unmilitary.

At no great distance from the base of the hill, stood the barns and the stables. They were surrounded by a vast range of rude but warm sheds, beneath which sheep and horned

cattle were usually sheltered from the storms of the rigorous winters of the climate. The surfaces of the meadows, immediately around the out-buildings, were of a smoother and richer sward than those in the distance, and the fences were on a far more artificial, and perhaps durable, though scarcely on a more serviceable plan. A large orchard, of some ten or fifteen years growth, too, added greatly to the air of improvement, which put this smiling valley in such strong and pleasing contrast to the endless and nearly untenanted woods by which it was environed.

Of the interminable forest it is not necessary to speak. With the solitary exception, on the mountain side, and of here and there a wind-row, along which the trees had been uprooted, by the furious blasts that sometimes sweep off acres of our trees in a minute, the eye could find no other object to study in the vast setting of this quiet rural picture, but the seemingly endless maze of wilderness. The broken surface of

the land, however, limited the view to an horizon of no great extent, though the art of man could scarcely devise colours so vivid or so gay as those which were afforded by the brilliant hues of the foliage. The keen, biting frosts, known at the close of a New England autumn, had already touched the broad and fringed leaves of the maples, and the sudden and secret process had been wrought upon all the other varieties of the forest, producing that magical effect, which can be nowhere seen, except in regions in which nature is so bountiful and luxuriant in summer, and so sudden and so stern in the change of the seasons.

Over this picture of prosperity and peace, the eye of old Mark Heathcote wandered with a keen degree of worldly prudence. The melancholy sounds of the variously toned bells, ringing hollow and plaintively among the arches of the woods, gave him reason to believe that the herds of the family were returning, voluntarily, from their unlimited forest pasturage. His

grandson, a fine spirited boy of some fourteen years, was approaching through the fields. The youngster drove before him a small flock, which domestic necessity compelled the family to keep at great occasional loss, and at a heavy expense of time and trouble ; both of which could alone protect them from the ravages of the beasts of prey. A species of half-witted serving lad, whom charity had induced the old man to harbour among his dependants, was seen issuing from the woods, nearly in a line with the neglected clearing on the mountain side. The latter advanced, shouting and urging before him a drove of colts, as shaggy, as wayward, and nearly as untamed, as himself.

“How now, weak one,” said the Puritan, with a severe eye, as the two lads approached him, with their several charges from different directions, and nearly at the same instant ; “how now, sirrah ; dost worry the cattle in this gait, when the eyes of the prudent are turned from thee ? Do as thou wouldst be done by, is a

just and healthful admonition, that the learned and the simple, the weak and the strong of mind, should alike recal to their thoughts and their practice. I do not know that an over-driven colt will be at all more apt to make a gentle and useful beast in its prime, than one treated with kindness and care."

"I believe the evil one has got into all the kine, no less than into the foals," sullenly returned the lad; "I've called to them in anger, and I've spoken to them as if they had been my natural kin, and yet neither fair word, nor foul tongue, will bring them to hearken to advice. There is something frightful in the woods this very sun-down, master; or colts, that I have driven the summer through, would not be apt to give this unfair treatment to one they ought to know to be their friend."

"Thy sheep are counted, Mark?" resumed the grandfather, turning towards his descendant with a less austere, but always an authoritative brow; "thy mother hath need of every fleece

to provide covering for thee and others like thee; thou knowest, child, that the creatures are few, and our winters weary and cold."

"My mother's loom shall never be idle from carelessness of mine," returned the confident boy; "but counting and wishing cannot make seven and thirty fleeces, where there are only six and thirty backs to carry them. I have been an hour among the briars and bushes of the hill logging, looking for the lost wether, and yet neither lock, hoof, hide, nor horn, is there to say what hath befallen the animal."

"Thou hast lost a sheep!—this carelessness will cause thy mother to grieve."

"Grandfather, I have been no idler. Since the last hunt, the flock hath been allowed to browse the woods, for no man, in all that week, saw wolf, panther, or bear, though the country was up, from the great river to the outer settlements of the colony. The biggest four-footed animal that lost its hide in the muster was a thin-ribbed deer, and the stoutest battle given

was between wild Whittal Ring, here, and a wood-chuck that kept him at arms' length for the better part of an afternoon."

"Thy tale may be true, but it neither finds that which is lost, nor completeth the number of thy mother's flock. Hast thou ridden carefully throughout the clearing?—it is not long since I saw the animals grazing in that quarter. What hast thou twisting in thy fingers, in that wasteful and unthankful manner, Whittal?"

"What would make a winter blanket, if there was enough of it! wool! and wool too, that came from the thigh of old Straight-Horns; else have I forgotten a leg that gives the longest and coarsest hair at the shearing."

"That truly seemeth a lock from the animal that is wanting," exclaimed the other boy. "There is no other creature in the flock, with fleece so coarse and shaggy. Where found you the handful, Whittal Ring?"

"Growing on the branch of a thorn. Queer

fruit this, masters, to be seen where young plums ought to ripen !”

“ Go, go,” interrupted the old man, “ thou idlest, and misspendest the time in vain talk. Go, fold thy flock, Mark ; and do thou, weak one, house thy charge with less uproar than is wont. We should remember that the voice is given to man, firstly, that he may improve the blessing in thanksgivings and petitions ; secondly, to communicate such gifts as may be imparted to himself, and which it is his bounden duty to attempt to impart to others ; and then, thirdly, to declare his natural wants and inclinations.”

With this admonition, which probably proceeded from a secret consciousness in the Puritan, that he had permitted a momentary cloud of selfishness to obscure the brightness of his faith, the party separated. The grandson and the hireling took their several ways to the folds, while old Mark himself slowly continued his course towards the dwellings. It was near

enough to the hours of darkness, to render the preparations we have mentioned prudent ; still no urgency called for particular haste, in the return of the veteran to the shelter and protection of his own comfortable and secure abode. He therefore loitered along the path, occasionally stopping to look into the prospects of the young crops, that were beginning to spring up in readiness for the coming year, and at times bending his gaze around the whole of his limited horizon, like one who had the habit of exceeding and unremitted care.

One of these numerous pauses promised to be much longer than usual. Instead of keeping his understanding eye on the grain, the look of the old man appeared fastened, as by a charm, on some distant and obscure object. Doubt and uncertainty, for many minutes, seemed to mingle in his gaze. But all hesitation had apparently disappeared, as his lips severed and he spoke, perhaps unconsciously, to himself, aloud.

“It is no deception,” were the low words, “but a living and an accountable creature of the Lord’s. Many a day has passed since such a sight hath been witnessed in this vale; but my eye greatly deceives me, or yonder cometh one ready to ask for hospitality, and, peradventure, for christian and brotherly communion.”

The sight of the aged emigrant had not deceived him. One, who appeared a way-worn and weary traveller, had indeed ridden out of the forest, at a point where a path, that was easier to be traced by the blazed trees that lay along its route, than by any marks on the earth itself, issued into the cleared land. The progress of the stranger had, at first, been so wary and slow, as to bear the manner of exceeding and mysterious caution. The blind road, along which he must have ridden not only far but hard, or night had certainly overtaken him in the woods, led to one of the distant settlements

that lay near to the fertile banks of the Connecticut. Few ever followed its windings, but they who had especial affairs, or extraordinary communion, in the way of religious friendships, with the proprietors of the Wish-Ton-Wish, as, in commemoration of the first bird that had been seen by the emigrants, the valley of the Heathcotes was called.

Once fairly in view, any doubt or apprehension that the stranger might at first have entertained, disappeared. He rode boldly and steadily forward, until he drew a rein that his impoverished and weary beast gladly obeyed, within a few feet of the proprietor of the valley, whose gaze had never ceased to watch his movements, from the instant when the other first came within view. Before speaking, the stranger, a man whose head was getting gray, apparently as much with hardship as with time, and one whose great weight would have proved a grievous burthen, in a long ride, to even a better conditioned

beast than the ill favoured provincial hack he had ridden, dismounted, and threw the bridle loose upon the drooping neck of the animal. The latter, without a moment's delay, and with a greediness that denoted long abstinence, profited by its liberty to crop the herbage where it stood.

“ I cannot be mistaken when I suppose that I have at length reached the valley of the Wish-Ton-Wish,” the visiter said, touching a soiled and slouched beaver that more than half concealed his features. The question was put in an English that bespoke a descent from those who dwell in the midland counties of the mother country, rather than in that intonation, which is still to be traced, equally in the western portions of England and in the eastern states of the Union. Notwithstanding the purity of his accent, there was enough in the form of his speech to denote a severe compliance with the fashion of the religionists of the times. He used

that measured and methodical tone, which was, singularly enough, believed to distinguish an entire absence of affectation in language.

“Thou hast reached the dwelling of him thou seekest; one who is a submissive sojourner in the wilderness of the world, and an humble servitor in the outer temple.”

“This, then, is Mark Heathcote!” repeated the stranger, in tones of interest, regarding the other with a look of long, and, possibly, of suspicious investigation.

“Such is the name I bear. A fitting confidence in Him who knows so well how to change the wilds into the haunts of men, and much suffering, have made me the master of what thou seest. Whether thou comest to tarry a night, a week, a month, or even for a still longer season, as a brother in care, and I doubt not one who striveth for the right, I bid thee welcome.”

The stranger thanked his host, by a slow in-

clination of the head, but the gaze, which began to partake a little of the look of recognition, was still too earnest and engrossing to admit of verbal reply. On the other hand, though the old man had scanned the broad and rusty beaver, the coarse and well-worn doublet, the heavy boots, and, in short, the whole attire of his visitor, in which he saw no vain conformity to idle fashions to condemn, it was evident that personal recollection had not the smallest influence in quickening his hospitality.

“Thou hast arrived happily,” continued the Puritan; “had night overtaken thee in the forest, unless much practised in the shifts of our young woodsmen, hunger, frost, and a supperless bed of brush, would have given thee motive to think more of the body, than is either profitable or seemly.”

The stranger might possibly have known the embarrassment of these several hardships, for the quick and unconscious glance he threw over

his soiled dress, should have betrayed some familiarity, already, with the privations to which his host alluded. As neither of them, however, seemed disposed to waste further time on matters of such light moment, the traveller put an arm through the bridle of his horse, and, in obedience to an invitation from the owner of the dwelling, they took their way towards the fortified edifice, on the natural mound.

The task of furnishing litter and provender to the jaded beast was performed by Whittal Ring, under the inspection, and, at times, under the instructions of its owner and his host, both of whom appeared to take a kind and commendable interest in the comfort of a faithful hack, that had evidently suffered long and much in the service of its master. When this duty was discharged, the old man and his unknown guest entered the house together; the frank and unpretending hospitality of a country like that they were in, rendering suspicion, or hesitation,

qualities that were unknown to the reception of a man of white blood; more especially if he spoke the language of the island, which was then first sending out its swarms, to subdue and possess so large a portion of a continent, that nearly divides the earth in moieties.

CHAPTER III.

“This is most strange : your father’s in some passion
That works him strongly.”

Tempest.

A FEW hours made a great change in the occupations of the different members of our simple and secluded family. The kine had yielded their nightly tribute ; the oxen had been released from the yoke, and were now secure beneath their sheds ; the sheep were in their folds, safe from the assaults of the prowling wolf,

and care had been taken to see that every thing possessing life was gathered within the particular defences that were provided for its security and comfort. But while all this caution was used in behalf of living things, the utmost indifference prevailed on the subject of that species of moveable property, which, elsewhere, would have been guarded with at least an equal jealousy. The homely fabrics of the looms of Ruth, lay on their bleaching ground, to drink in the night dew: and ploughs, harrows, carts, saddles, and other similar articles, were left in situations so exposed, as to prove that the hand of man had occupations so numerous and so urgent, as to render it inconvenient to bestow labour where it was not considered absolutely necessary.

Content himself was the last to quit the fields and the out-buildings. When he reached the postern in the palisadoes, he stopped to call to those above him, in order to learn if any yet lingered without the wooden barriers. The

answer being in the negative, he entered, and drawing to the small but heavy gate, he secured it with bar, bolt, and lock, carefully and jealously, with his own hand. As this was no more than a nightly and necessary precaution, the affairs of the family received no interruption. The meal of the hour was soon ended, and conversation, with those light toils which are peculiar to the long evenings of the fall and winter in families on the frontier, succeeded, as fitting employments to close the business of a laborious and well-spent day.

Notwithstanding the entire simplicity which marked the opinions and usages of the colonists at that period, and the great equality of condition which even to this hour distinguishes the particular community of which we write, choice and inclination drew some natural distinctions in the ordinary intercourse of the inmates of the Heathcote family. A fire, so bright and cheerful as to render candles or torches unnecessary, blazed on an enormous hearth in a sort

of upper kitchen. Around it were seated six or seven hardy and athletic young men, some drawing coarse tools carefully through the curvatures of ox bows, others scraping down the helves of axes, or perhaps fashioning sticks of birch into homely but convenient brooms. A demure, side-looking young woman kept her great wheel in motion, while one or two others were passing from room to room, with the notable and stirring industry of handmaidens busied in the more familiar cares of the household. A door communicated with an inner and superior apartment. Here was a smaller but an equally cheerful fire; a floor which had recently been swept, while that without had been freshly sprinkled with river sand; candles of tallow on a table of cherry-wood from the neighbouring forest; walls that were wainscotted in the black-oak of the country; and a few other articles, of a fashion so antique, and of ornaments so ingenious and rich, as to announce that they had been transported from beyond

sea. Above the mantel were suspended the armorial bearings of the Heathcotes and the Hardings, elaborately emblazoned in tent-stitch.

The principal personages of the family were seated around the latter hearth, while a straggler from the other room, of more than usual curiosity, had placed himself among them, marking the distinction in ranks, or rather in situation, merely by the extraordinary care which he took that none of the scrapings should litter the spotless oaken floor.

Until this period of the evening, the duties of hospitality and the observances of religion had prevented familiar discourse. But the offices of the housewife were now ended for the night ; the handmaidens had all retired to their wheels : and as the bustle of a busy and more stirring domestic industry ceased, the cold and self-restrained silence, which had hitherto only been broken by distant and brief observations of courtesy, or by some wholesome allusion to

the lost and probationary condition of man, seemed to invite an intercourse of a more general character.

“ You entered my clearing by the southern path,” commenced Mark Heathcote, addressing himself to his guest with sufficient courtesy, “ and needs must bring tidings from the towns on the river side. Has aught been done by our counsellors, at home, in the matter that pertaineth so closely to the well-being of this colony ?”

“ You would have me say whether he that now sitteth on the throne of England hath listened to the petitions of his people in this province, and hath granted them protection against the abuses which might so readily flow out of his own ill-advised will, or out of the violence and injustice of his successors ?”

“ We will render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s ; and speak reverently of men having authority. I would fain know whether the agent sent by our people hath gained the

ears of those who counsel the prince, and obtained that which he sought?"

"He hath done more," returned the stranger, with singular asperity; "he hath even gained the ear of the Lord's anointed."

"Then is Charles of better mind and of stronger justice than report hath spoken. We were told that light manners and unprofitable companions had led him to think more of the vanities of the world, and less of the wants of those over whom he hath been called by Providence to rule, than is meet for one that sitteth on a high place. I rejoice that the arguments of the man we sent, have prevailed over more evil promptings, and that peace and freedom of conscience are likely to be the fruits of the undertaking. In what manner hath he seen fit to order the future government of this people?"

"Much as it hath ever stood, by their own ordinances. Winthrop hath returned, and is the bearer of a Royal Charter, which granteth all

the rights long claimed and practised. None now dwell under the Crown of Britain with fewer offensive demands on their consciences, or with lighter calls on their political duties, than the men of Connecticut."

"It is fitting that thanks should be rendered, therefore, where thanks are most due," said the Puritan, folding his hands on his bosom, and sitting for a moment with closed eyes, like one who communed with an unseen being. "Is it known by what manner of argument the Lord moved the heart of the prince to hearken to our wants; or was it an open and manifest token of his power?"

"I think it must needs have been the latter," rejoined the visiter, with a manner that grew still more caustic and emphatic. "The bauble, that was the visible agent, could not have weighed greatly with one so proudly seated before the eyes of men."

Until this point in the discourse, Content and Ruth, with their offspring, and the two or three

other individuals who composed the audience, had listened with the demure gravity which characterized the manners of the country. The language, united with the ill-concealed sarcasm conveyed by the countenance, no less than the emphasis of the speaker, caused them now to raise their eyes, as by a common impulse. The word "bauble" was audibly and curiously repeated. But the look of cold irony had already passed from the features of the stranger, and it had given place to a stern and fixed austerity, that imparted a character of grimness to his hard and sun-burnt visage. Still he betrayed no disposition to shrink from the subject; but, after regarding his auditors with a glance in which pride and suspicion were strongly blended, he resumed the discourse.

"It is known," he added, "that the grandfather of him the good people of these settlements have commissioned to bear their wants over sea, lived in the favour of the man who last sat upon the throne of England; and a rumour

goeth forth, that the Stuart, in a moment of princely condescension, once decked the finger of his subject with a ring, wrought in a curious fashion. It was a token of the love which a monarch may bear a man."

"Such gifts are beacons of friendship, but may not be used as gay and sinful ornaments," observed Mark, while the other paused like one who wished none of the bitterness of his allusions to be lost.

"It matters not whether the bauble lay in the coffers of the Winthrops, or has long been glittering before the eyes of the faithful, in the Bay, since it hath finally proved to be a jewel of price," continued the stranger. "It is said, in secret, that this ring hath returned to the finger of a Stuart, and it is openly proclaimed that Connecticut hath a charter."

Content and his wife regarded each other in melancholy amazement. Such an evidence of wanton levity and of unworthiness of motive, in one who was entrusted with the gift of earthly

government, pained their simple and upright minds; while old Mark, of still more decided and exaggerated ideas of spiritual perfection, distinctly groaned aloud. The stranger took a sensible pleasure in this testimony of their abhorrence of so gross and so unworthy a venality, though he saw no occasion to heighten its effect by further speech. When his host stood erect, and, in a voice that was accustomed to obedience, he called on his family to join, in behalf of the reckless ruler of the land of their fathers, in a petition to Him who alone could soften the hearts of princes, he also arose from his seat. But even in this act of devotion, the stranger bore the air of one who wished to do pleasure to his entertainers, rather than to obtain that which was asked.

The prayer, though short, was pointed, fervent, and sufficiently personal. The wheels in the outer room ceased their hum, and a general movement denoted that all there had arisen to join in the office, while one or two of their

number, impelled by deeper piety, or stronger interest, drew near to the open door between the rooms, in order to listen. With this singular, but characteristic interruption, that particular branch of the discourse which had given rise to it, altogether ceased.

“And have we reason to dread a rising of the savages on the borders?” asked Content, when he found that the moved spirit of his father was not yet sufficiently calmed, to return to the examination of temporal things; “one who brought wares from the towns below, a few months since, recited reasons to fear a movement among the red men.”

The subject had not sufficient interest to open the ears of the stranger. He was deaf, or he chose to affect deafness, to the interrogatory. Laying his two large and weather-worn, though still muscular hands, on a visage that was much darkened by exposure, he appeared to shut out the objects of the world, while he communed deeply, and, as would seem by a slight tremor,

that shook even his powerful frame, terribly with his own thoughts.

“We have many to whom our hearts strongly cling to heighten the smallest symptom of alarm from that quarter,” added the tender and anxious mother, her eye glancing at the uplifted countenances of two little girls, who, busied with their light needle-work, sate on stools at her feet. “But I rejoice to see that one who hath journeyed from parts where the minds of the savages must be better understood, hath not feared to do it unarmed.”

The traveller slowly uncovered his features, and the glance that his eye shot over the face of the last speaker, was not without a gentle and interested expression. Instantly recovering his composure, he arose, and turning to the double leathern sack, which had been borne on the crupper of his nag, and which now lay at no great distance from his seat, he drew a pair of horseman’s pistols from two well contrived

pockets in its sides, and laid them deliberately on the table.

“Though little disposed to seek an encounter with any bearing the image of man,” he said, “I have not neglected the usual precautions of those who enter the wilderness. Here are weapons that, in steady hands, might easily take life, or, at need, preserve it.”

The young Mark drew near with boyish curiosity, and while one finger ventured to touch a lock, as he stole a conscious glance of wrongdoing towards his mother, he said, with as much of contempt in his air as the schooling of his manners would allow—

“An Indian arrow would make a surer aim than a bore as short as this! When the trainer from the Hartford town struck the wild-cat on the hill clearing, he sent the bullet from a five foot barrel; besides, this short-sighted gun would be a dull weapon in a hug against the keen-edged knife that the wicked Wampanoag is known to carry.”

“Boy, thy years are few, and thy boldness of speech marvellous,” sternly interrupted his parent in the second degree.

The stranger manifested no displeasure at the confident language of the lad. Encouraging him with a look, which plainly proclaimed that martial qualities in no degree lessened the strippling in his favour, he observed that—

“The youth who is not afraid to think of the fight, or to reason on its chances, will lead to a manhood of spirit and independence. A hundred thousand striplings like this, might have spared Winthrop his jewel, and the Stuart the shame of yielding to so vain and so trivial a bribe. But thou mayest also see, child, that had we come to the death hug, the wicked Wampanoag might have found a blade as keen as his own.”

The stranger, while speaking, loosened a few strings of his doublet, and thrust a hand into his bosom. The action enabled more than one eye to catch a momentary glimpse of a weapon

of the same description, but of a size much smaller than those he had already so freely exhibited. As he immediately withdrew the member, and again closed the garment with studied care, no one presumed to advert to the circumstance, but all turned their attention to the long sharp hunting knife that he deposited by the side of the pistols, as he concluded. Mark ventured to open its blade, but he turned away with sudden consciousness, when he found that a few fibres of coarse, shaggy wool, that were drawn from the loosened joint, adhered to his fingers.

“Straight-Horns has been against a bush sharper than the thorn!” exclaimed Whittal Ring, who had been at hand, and who watched with childish admiration the smallest proceedings of the different individuals. “A steel for the back of the blade, a few dried leaves and broken sticks, with such a carver, would soon make roast and broiled of the old bell-wether himself. I know that the hair of all my colts is

sorrel, and I counted five at sundown, which is just as many as went loping through the underbrush when I loosened them from the hobbles in the morning; but six-and-thirty backs can never carry seven-and-thirty growing fleeces of unsheared wool. Master knows that, for he is a scholar, and can count a hundred!"

The allusion to the fate of the lost sheep was so plain as to admit of no misinterpretation of the meaning of the witless speaker. Animals of that class were of the last importance to the comfort of the settlers, and there was not probably one within hearing of Whittal Ring, that was at all ignorant of the import of his words. Indeed, the loud chuckle and the open and deriding manner with which the lad himself held above his head the hairy fibres that he had snatched from young Mark, allowed of no concealment, had it been desirable.

"This feeble gifted youth would hint that thy knife hath proved its edge on a wether that is missing from our flock, since the animals went

on their mountain range in the morning," said the host, calmly ; though even he bent his eye to the floor as he waited for an answer to a remark, direct as the one his sense of justice and his indomitable love of right had prompted.

The stranger demanded, in a voice that lost none of its depth or firmness, "Is hunger a crime, that they who dwell so far from the haunts of selfishness visit it with their anger?"

"The foot of christian man never approached the gates of Wish-Ton-Wish to be turned away in uncharitableness, but that which is freely given should not be taken in licentiousness. From off the hill, where my flock is wont to graze, it is easy, through many an opening of the forest, to see these roofs ; and it would have been better that the body should languish, than that a grievous sin should be placed on that immortal spirit, which is already too deeply laden, unless thou art far more happy than others of the fallen race of Adam."

“ Mark Heathcote,” said the accused, and ever with an unwavering tone, “ look further at those weapons, which, if a guilty man, I have weakly placed within thy power. Thou wilt find more there to wonder at, than a few straggling hairs, that the spinner would cast from her as too coarse for service.”

“ It is long since I found pleasure in handling the weapons of strife ; may it be longer to the time when they shall be needed in this abode of peace. These are instruments of death, resembling those used in my youth, by cavaliers that rode in the levies of the first Charles, and of his pusillanimous father. There were worldly pride and great vanity, with much and damning ungodliness, in the wars that I have seen, my children ; and yet the carnal man found pleasure in the stirrings of those graceless days ! Come hither, younker ; thou hast often sought to know the manner in which the horsemen are wont to lead into the combat, when the broad mouthed artillery, and pattering leaden hail have cleared

a passage for the struggle of horse to horse, and man to man. Much of the justification of these combats must depend on the inward spirit, and on the temper of him that striketh at the life of his fellow sinner ; but righteous Joshua, it is known, contended with the heathen throughout a supernatural day : and therefore, always humbly confiding that our cause is just I will open to thy young mind the uses of a weapon that hath never before been seen in these forests."

" I have hefted many a heavier piece than this," said young Mark, frowning equally with the exertion and with the instigations of his aspiring spirit, as he held out the ponderous weapon in a single hand ; " we have guns that might tame a wolf with greater certainty than any barrel of a bore less than my own height. Tell me, grand'ther, at what distance do the mounted warriors you so often name, take their sight ?"

But the power of speech appeared suddenly

to have deserted the aged veteran. He had interrupted his own discourse, and now, instead of answering the interrogatory of the boy, his eye wandered, slowly, and with a look of painful doubt, from the weapon, that he still held before him, to the countenance of the stranger. The latter continued erect, like one courting a strict and meaning examination of his person. This dumb show could not fail to attract the observation of Content. Rising from his seat, with that quiet but authoritative manner which is still seen in the domestic government of the people of the region where he dwelt, he beckoned to all present to quit the apartment. Ruth and her daughters, the hirelings, the ill gifted Whittal, and even the reluctant Mark, preceded him to the door, which he closed with respectful care: and then the whole of the wondering party mingled with those of the outer room, leaving the one they had quitted to the sole possession of the aged chief of the settlement, and to his still unknown and mysterious guest.

Many anxious, and, to those who were excluded, seemingly interminable minutes passed, and the secret interview appeared to draw no nearer its close. That deep reverence, which the years, paternity, and character of the grandfather had inspired, prevented all from approaching the quarter of the apartment nearest to the room they had left ; but a silence, still as the grave, did all that silence could do, to enlighten their minds in a matter of so much general interest. The deep, smothered sentences of the speakers were often heard, each dwelling with steadiness and propriety on his particular theme : but no sound that conveyed meaning to the minds of those without, passed the envious walls. At length the voice of old Mark became more than usually audible, and then Content arose, with a gesture to those around him to imitate his example. The young men threw aside the subjects of their light employments, the maidens left the wheels, which had not been turned for many minutes, and the whole party disposed

themselves in the decent and simple attitudes of prayer. For the third time that evening was the voice of the Puritan heard, pouring out his spirit in a communion with that Being on whom it was his practice to repose all his worldly cares. But, though long accustomed to all the peculiar forms of utterance by which their father ordinarily expressed his pious emotions, neither Content, nor his attentive partner, was enabled to decide on the nature of the feeling that was now uppermost. At times, it appeared to be the language of thanksgiving, and at others it assumed more of the imploring sounds of deprecation and petition; in short, it was so varied and, though tranquil, so equivocal, if such a term may be applied to so serious a subject, as completely to baffle every conjecture.

Long and weary minutes passed after the voice had entirely ceased, and yet no summons was given to the expecting family, nor did any sound proceed from the inner room, which the respectful son was emboldened to construe into an

evidence that he might presume to enter. At length, apprehension began to mingle with conjectures, and then the husband and wife communed apart, in whispers. The misgivings and doubt of the former, soon manifested themselves in still more apparent forms. He arose, and was seen pacing the wide apartment, gradually approaching nearer to the partition which separated the two rooms, evidently prepared to retire beyond the limits of hearing, the moment he should detect any proofs that his uneasiness was without a sufficient cause. Still no sound proceeded from the inner room. The breathless silence which had so shortly before reigned where he was, appeared to be suddenly transferred to the spot in which he was vainly endeavouring to detect the smallest proof of human existence. Again he returned to Ruth, and again they consulted in low voices, as to the step that filial duty seemed to require at their hands.

“We were not bidden to withdraw,” said his gentle companion; “why not rejoin our parent,

now that time has been given to understand the subject which so evidently disturbed his mind?"

Content, at length, yielded to this opinion. With that cautious discretion which distinguishes his people, he motioned to the family to follow, in order that no unnecessary exclusion should give rise to conjectures, or excite suspicions, for which, after all, the circumstances might prove no justification. Notwithstanding the subdued manners of the age and country, curiosity, and perhaps a better feeling, had become so intense, as to cause all present to obey this silent mandate, by moving as swiftly towards the open door as a never yielding decency of demeanour would permit.

Old Mark Heathcote occupied the chair in which he had been left, with that calm and unbending gravity of eye and features, which was then thought indispensable to a fitting sobriety of spirit. But the stranger had disappeared. There were two or three outlets by which the room, and even the house, might be

quitted, without the knowledge of those who had so long waited for admission, and the first impression led the family to expect the re-appearance of the absent man, through one of these exterior passages. Content, however, read in the expression of his father's eye, that the moment of confidence, if it were ever to arrive, had not yet come; and so admirable and perfect was the domestic discipline of this family, that the questions which the son did not see fit to propound, no one of inferior condition, or lesser age, might presume to agitate. With the person of the stranger, every evidence of his recent visit had also vanished.

Mark missed the weapon that had excited his admiration; Whittal looked in vain for the hunting knife which had betrayed the fate of the wether; Mrs. Heathcote saw by a hasty glance of the eye that the leathern sacks, which she had borne in mind ought to be transferred to the sleeping apartment of their guest, were gone; and a mild and playful image of herself, who

bore her name, no less than most of those features which had rendered her own youth more than usually attractive, sought without success a massive silver spur, of curious and antique workmanship, which she had been permitted to handle until the moment when the family had been commanded to withdraw.

The night had now worn later than the hour at which it was usual for people of habits so simple to be out of their beds. The grandfather lighted a taper, and, after bestowing the usual blessing on those around him, with an air as calm as if nothing had occurred, he prepared to retire into his own room. And yet matter of interest seemed to linger on his mind. Even on the threshold of the door he turned ; and, for an instant, all expected some explanation of a circumstance which began to wear no little of the aspect of an exciting and painful mystery. But their hopes were raised only to be disappointed.

“ My thoughts have not kept the passage of

the time," he said. "In what hour of the night are we, my son?"

He was told that it was already past the usual moment of sleep.

"No matter; that which Providence hath bestowed for our comfort and support should not be lightly and unthankfully disregarded. Take thou the beast I am wont to ride, thyself, Content, and follow the path which leadeth to the mountain clearing; bring away that which shall meet thine eye, near the first turning of the route toward the river towns. We have got into the last quarter of the year; and in order that our industry may not flag, and that all may be stirring with the sun, let the remainder of the household seek their rest."

Content saw, by the manner of his father, that no departure from the strict letter of these instructions was admissible. He closed the door after his retiring form, and then, by a quiet gesture of authority, indicated to his dependants

that they were expected to withdraw. The maidens of Ruth led the children to their chambers ; and, in a few more minutes, none remained in the outer apartment, already so often named, but the obedient son, with his anxious and affectionate consort.

“ I will be thy companion, husband,” Ruth half whisperingly commenced, so soon as the little domestic preparations for leaving the fires and securing the doors were ended. “ I like not that thou shouldst go into the forest alone, at so late an hour of the night.”

“ One will be with me there, who never deserteth those who rely on his protection. Besides, my Ruth, what is there to apprehend in a wilderness like this ? The beasts have been lately hunted from the hills, and, excepting those who dwell under our own roof, there is not one within a long day’s ride.”

“ We know not. Where is the stranger that came within our doors as the sun was setting ?”

“ As thou sayest, we know not. My father is not minded to open his lips on the subject of this traveller ; and surely we are not now to learn the lessons of obedience and self-denial.”

“ It would, notwithstanding, be a great easing to the spirit to hear at least the name of him who hath eaten of our bread and joined in our family worship, though he were immediately to pass away for ever from before the sight.”

“ That may he have done already !” returned the less curious and more self-restrained husband. “ My father will not that we inquire.”

“ And yet there can be little sin in knowing the condition of one whose fortunes and movements can excite neither our envy nor our strife. I would that we had tarried for a closer mingling in the prayers ; it was not seemly to desert a guest who, it would appear, had need of an especial up-offering in his behalf.”

“ Our spirits joined in the asking, though our ears were shut to the matter of his wants. But

it will be needful that I should be afoot with the young men in the morning, and a mile of measurement would not reach to the turning, in the path to the river towns. Go with me to the postern, and look to the fastenings; I will not keep thee long on thy watch."

Content and his wife now quitted the dwelling, by the only door that was left unbarred. Lighted by a moon that was full, though clouded, they passed a gateway between two of the outer buildings, and descended to the palisadoes. The bars and bolts of the little postern were removed; and in a few minutes the former, mounted on the back of his father's own horse, was galloping briskly along the path which led into the part of the forest he was directed to seek.

While the husband was thus proceeding, in obedience to orders that he never hesitated to obey, his faithful wife withdrew within the shelter of the wooden defences. More in compliance with a precaution that was become habitual, than from

any present causes of suspicion, she drew a single bolt, and remained at the postern, anxiously awaiting the result of a movement that was as unaccountable as it was extraordinary.

CHAPTER IV.

“ I’ the name of something holy, Sir, why stand you
In this strange stare ?”

Tempest.

As a girl, Ruth Harding had been one of the mildest and gentlest of the human race. Though new impulses had been given to her naturally kind affections, by the attachments of a wife and mother, her disposition suffered no change by marriage. Obedient, disinterested, and devoted to those she loved, as her parents had known her, so, by the experience of many years, had she

proved to Content. In the midst of the utmost equanimity of temper and of deportment, her watchful solicitude in behalf of the few who formed the limited circle of her existence never slumbered. It dwelt unpretendingly, but active, in her gentle bosom, like a great and moving principle of life. Though circumstances had placed her on a remote and exposed frontier, where time had not been given for the several customary divisions of employments, she was unchanged in habits, in feelings, and in character. The affluence of her husband had elevated her above the necessity of burthensome toil; and while she had encountered the dangers of the wilderness, and neglected none of the duties of her active station, she had escaped most of those injurious consequences which are a little apt to impair the peculiar loveliness of woman. Notwithstanding the exposure of a border life, she remained feminine, attractive, and singularly youthful.

The reader will readily imagine the state of

mind with which such a being watched the distant form of a husband, engaged in a duty like that we have described. Notwithstanding the influence of long habit, the forest was rarely approached, after night fall, by the boldest woodsman, without some secret consciousness that he encountered a positive danger. It was the hour when its roaming and hungry tenants were known to be most in motion ; and the rustling of a leaf, or the snapping of a dried twig, beneath the light tread of the smallest animal, was apt to conjure images of the voracious and fire-eyed panther, or perhaps of a lurking biped, which, though more artful, was known to be scarcely less savage. It is true that hundreds experienced the uneasiness of such sensations, who were never fated to undergo the realities of the fearful pictures. Still facts were not wanting to supply sufficient motive for a grave and reasonable apprehension.

Histories of combats with beasts of prey, and of massacres by roving and lawless Indians, were the moving legends of the border.

Thrones might be subverted, and kingdoms lost and won in distant Europe, and less should be said of the events, by those who dwelt in these woods, than of one scene of peculiar and striking forest incident, that called for the exercise of the stout courage and the keen intelligence of a settler. Such a tale passed from mouth to mouth, with the eagerness of powerful personal interest; and many were already transmitted from parent to child, in the form of tradition, until, as, in more artificial communities, graver improbabilities creep into the doubtful pages of history, exaggeration became too closely blended with truth, ever again to be separated.

Under the influence of these feelings, and perhaps prompted by his never failing discretion, Content had thrown a well-trying piece over his shoulder: and when he rose the ascent on which his father had met the stranger, Ruth caught a glimpse of his form, bending on the neck of his horse, and gliding through

the misty light of the hour, resembling one of those fancied images of wayward and hard riding sprites, of which the tales of the eastern continent are so fond of speaking.

Then followed anxious moments, during which neither sight nor hearing could in the least aid the conjectures of the attentive wife. She listened without breathing, and once or twice she thought the blows of hoofs, falling on the earth harder and quicker than common, might be distinguished; but it was only as Content mounted the sudden ascent of the hill-side that he was again seen, for a brief instant, while dashing swiftly into the cover of the woods.

Though Ruth had been familiar with the cares of the frontier, perhaps she had never known a moment more intensely painful than that when the form of her husband became blended with the dark trunks of the trees. The time was to her impatience longer than usual: and, under the excitement of a feverish

inquietude, that had no definite object, she removed the single bolt that held the postern closed, and passed entirely without the stockade. To her oppressed senses, the palisadoes appeared to place limits to her vision. Still, weary minute passed after minute, without bringing relief. During these anxious moments she became more than usually conscious of the insulated situation in which he and all who were dearest to her heart were placed. The feelings of a wife prevailed. Quitting the side of the acclivity, she began to walk slowly along the path her husband had taken, until apprehension insensibly urged her into a quicker movement. She had paused only when she stood nearly in the centre of the clearing, on the eminence where her father had halted that evening to contemplate the growing improvement of his estate.

Here her steps were suddenly arrested, for she thought a form was issuing from the forest, at that interesting spot which her eyes had

never ceased to watch. It proved to be no more than the passing shadow of a cloud, denser than common, which threw the body of its darkness on the trees, and a portion of its outline on the ground near the margin of the wood. Just at this instant, the recollection that she had incautiously left the postern open flashed upon her mind; and, with feelings divided between husband and children, she commenced her return, in order to repair a neglect, to which habit, no less than prudence, imparted a high degree of culpability. The eyes of the mother, for the feelings of that sacred character were now powerfully uppermost, were fastened on the ground, as she eagerly picked her way along the uneven surface: and so engrossed was her mind by the omission of duty with which she was severely reproaching herself, that they drunk in objects without conveying distinct or intelligible images to her brain.

Notwithstanding the one engrossing thought

of the moment, something met her eye that caused even the vacant organ to recoil, and every fibre in her frame to tremble with terror. There was a moment in which delirium nearly heightened terror to madness. Reflection came only when Ruth had reached the distance of many feet from the spot where this startling object had half unconsciously crossed her vision. Then for a single and a fearful instant she paused, like one who debated on the course she ought to follow. Maternal love prevailed, and the deer of her own woods scarcely bounds with greater agility than the mother of the sleeping and defenceless family now fled towards the dwellings. Panting and breathless she gained the postern, which was closed, with hands that performed their office more by instinct than in obedience to thought, and doubly and trebly barred.

For the first time in some minutes, Ruth now breathed distinctly and without pain. She strove to rally her thoughts, in order to

deliberate on the course that prudence and her duty to Content, who was still exposed to the danger she had herself escaped, prescribed. Her first impulse was to give the established signal that was to recal the labourers from the field, or to awake the sleepers, in the event of an alarm; but better reflection told her that such a step might prove fatal to him who balanced in her affections against the rest of the world. The struggle in her mind only ended, as she clearly and unequivocally caught a view of her husband, issuing from the forest, at the very point where he had entered. The return path unfortunately led directly past the spot where such sudden terror had seized her mind. She would have given worlds to have known how to apprize him of a danger with which her own imagination was full, without communicating the warning to other and terrible ears. The night was still, and though the distance was considerable, it was not so great as to render the chances of success desperate.

Scarcely knowing what she did, and yet preserving, by a sort of instinctive prudence, the caution which constant exposure weaves into all our habits, the trembling woman made the effort.

“ Husband ! husband ! ” she cried, commencing plaintively, but her voice rising with the energy of excitement, “ husband, ride swiftly ; our little Ruth lyeth in the agony. For her life and thine, ride at thy horse’s speed. Seek not the stables, but come with all haste to the postern ; it shall be open to thee.”

This was certainly a fearful summons for a father’s ear, and there is little doubt that, had the feeble powers of Ruth succeeded in conveying the words as far as she had wished, they would have produced the desired effect. But in vain did she call ; her weak tones, though raised on the notes of the keenest apprehension, could not force their way across so wide a space. And yet had she reason to

think they were not entirely lost, for once her husband paused and seemed to listen, and once he quickened the pace of his horse; though neither of these proofs of intelligence was followed by any further signs of his having understood the alarm.

Content was now upon the hillock itself. If Ruth breathed at all during its passage, it was more imperceptibly than the gentlest respiration of the sleeping infant. But when she saw him trotting with unconscious security along the path on the side next the dwellings, her impatience broke through all restraint, and throwing open the postern, she renewed her cries, in a voice that was no longer useless. The clattering of the unshodden hoof was again rapid, and in another minute her husband galloped unharmed to her side.

“Enter!” said the nearly dizzy wife, seizing the bridle, and leading the horse within the palisadoes; “enter, husband; for the love of all that is thine, enter, and be thankful.”

“What meaneth this terror, Ruth?” demanded Content, in as much displeasure, perhaps, as he could manifest to one so gentle, for a weakness betrayed in his own behalf; “is thy confidence in Him whose eye never closeth, and who equally watcheth the life of man and that of the falling sparrow, lost?”

Ruth was deaf. With hurried hands she drew the fastenings, let fall the bars, and turned a key which forced a triple-bolted lock to perform its office. Not till then did she feel either safe herself, or at liberty to render thanks for the safety of him over whose danger she had so lately watched in agony.

“Why this care? Hast forgotten that the horse will suffer hunger, at this distance from the rack and manger?”

“Better that he starve than hair of thine should come to harm.”

“Nay, nay, Ruth; dost not remember that the beast is the favourite of my father, who

will ill brook his passing a night within the palisadoes."

"Husband, you err; there is one in the fields."

"Is there place where One is not?"

"But I have seen creature of mortal birth, and creature too that hath no claim on thee or thine, and who trespasseth on our peace, no less than on our natural rights, to be where he lurketh."

"Go to; thou art not used to be so late from thy pillow, my poor Ruth; sleep hath come over thee, whilst standing on thy watch. Some cloud hath left its shadow on the fields, or, truly, it may be that the hunt did not drive the beasts as far from the clearing as we had thought. Come, since thou wilt cling to my side, lay hand on the bridle of the horse, while I ease him of his burthen."

As Content coolly proceeded to the task he had mentioned, the thoughts of his wife were

momentarily diverted from their other sources of uneasiness, by the object which lay on the crupper of the nag, and which, until now, had entirely escaped her observation.

“ Here is, indeed, the animal this day missing from our flock !” she exclaimed, as the carcass of a sheep fell heavily on the ground.

“ Ay, and killed with exceeding judgment, if not aptly dressed to our hands. Mutton will not be wanting for the husking feast, and the stalled creature whose days were counted may live another season.”

“ And where didst find the slaughtered beast ?”

“ On the limb of a growing hickory. Eben Dudley, with all his slight in butchering, and in setting forth the excellence of his meats, could not have left an animal hanging from the branch of a sapling, with greater knowledge of his craft. Thou seest, but a single

meal is missing from the carcass, and that thy fleece is unharmed."

"This is not the work of a Pequod!" exclaimed Ruth, surprised at her own discovery ; "the red men do their mischief with less care."

"Nor has the tooth of wolf opened the veins of poor Straight-Horns. Here has been judgment in the slaughtering, as well as prudence in consumption of the food. The hand that cut so lightly had intention of a second visit."

"And our father bid thee seek the creature where it was found ! Husband, I fear some heavy judgment for the sins of the parents, is likely to befall the children."

"The babes are quietly in their slumbers, and, thus far, little wrong hath been done us. I'll cast the halter from the stalled animal ere I sleep, and Straight-Horns shall content us for the husking. We may have mutton less savoury for this evil chance, but the number of thy flock will be unaltered."

“And where is he, who hath mingled in our prayers, and hath eaten of our bread ; he who counselled so long in secret with our father, and who hath now vanished from among us like a vision ?”

“That, indeed, is a question not readily to be answered,” returned Content, who had hitherto maintained a cheerful air, in order to appease what he was fain to believe a causeless terror in the bosom of his partner, but who was induced by this question to drop his head like one that sought reasons within the repository of his own thoughts. “It matter-eth not, Ruth Heathcote ; the ordering of the affair is in the hands of a man of many years and great experience ; should his aged wisdom fail, do we not know that One even wiser than he, hath us in his keeping ! I will return the beast to his rack : and when we shall have jointly asked favour of eyes that never sleep, we will go in confidence to our rest.”

“Husband, thou quittest not the palisadoes

again this night," said Ruth, arresting the hand that had already drawn a bolt, ere she spoke. "I have a warning of evil."

"I would the stranger had found some other shelter in which to pass his short resting season. That he hath made free with my flock, and that he hath administered to his hunger at some cost, when a single asking would have made him welcome to the best that the owner of the Wish-Ton-Wish can command, are truths that may not be denied. Still is he mortal man, as a goodly appetite hath proven, even should our belief in Providence so far waver as to harbour doubts of its unwillingness to suffer beings of injustice to wander in our forms and substance. I tell thee, Ruth, that the nag will be needed for to-morrow's service, and that our father will give but ill thanks should we leave it to make a bed on this cold hill-side. Go to thy rest and to thy prayers, trembler ; I will close the postern with all care. Fear not ; the stranger

is of human wants, and his agency to do evil must needs be limited by human power."

" I fear none of white blood, nor of christian parentage ; the murderous heathen is in our fields."

" Thou dreamest, Ruth !"

" 'Tis not a dream—I have seen the glowing eye-balls of a savage. Sleep was little like to come over me, when set upon a watch like this. I thought me that the errand was of unknown character, and that our father was exceedingly aged, and that perchance his senses might be duped, and how an obedient son ought not to be exposed—thou knowest, Heathcote, that I could not look upon the danger of my children's father with indifference, and I followed to the nut-tree hillock."

" To the nut-tree ! It was not prudent in thee.—But the postern ?"

" It was open ; for were the key turned, who was there to admit us quickly, had haste been needed ?" returned Ruth, momentarily

averting her face to conceal the flush excited by conscious delinquency. "Though I failed in caution, 'twas for thy safety, Heathcote; but on that hillock, and in the hollow left by a fallen tree, lies concealed a heathen!"

"I passed the nut-wood in going to the shambles of our strange butcher, and I drew the rein to give breath to the nag near it, as we returned with the burthen. It cannot be; some creature of the forest hath alarmed thee."

"Ay! creature, formed, fashioned, gifted like ourselves, in all but colour of the skin and blessing of the faith."

"This is strange delusion! If there were enemy at hand, would men, subtle as those you fear, suffer the master of the dwelling, and, truly I may say it without vain glory, one as likely as another to struggle stoutly for his own, to escape, when an ill-timed visit to the woods had delivered him unresisting into their hands? Go, go, good Ruth; thou mayst have seen a blackened log; perchance the frosts have left

a fire-fly untouched ; or it may be that some prowling bear has scented out the sweets of thy lately gathered hives."

Ruth again laid her hand firmly on the arm of her husband, who had withdrawn another bolt, and, looking him steadily in the face, she answered by saying, solemnly, and with touching pathos,

"Thinkest thou, husband, that a mother's eye could be deceived?"

It might have been that the allusion to the tender beings whose fate depended on his care, or that the deeply serious, though mild and gentle manner of his consort, produced some fresher impression on the mind of Content. Instead of undoing the fastenings of the postern, as he had intended, he deliberately drew its bolts again, and paused to think.

"If it produce no other benefit than to quiet thy fears, good Ruth," he said, after a moment of reflection, "a little caution will be well repaid. Stay you, then, here, where the hillock

may be watched, while I go wake a couple of the people. With stout Eben Dudley and experienced Reuben Ring to back me, my father's horse may surely be stabled."

Ruth contentedly assumed a task that she was quite equal to perform with intelligence and zeal. "Hie thee to the labourers' chambers, for I see a light still burning in the room of those you seek," was the answer she gave to a proposal that at least quieted the intenseness of her fears for him in whose behalf they had so lately been excited nearly to agony.

"It shall be quickly done; nay, stand not thus openly between the beams, wife. Thou mayst place thyself here, at the doublings of the wood, beneath the loop, where harm would scarcely reach thee, though shot from artillery were to crush the timber."

With this admonition to be wary of a danger that he had so recently affected to despise, Content departed on his errand. The two labourers he had mentioned by name, were

youths of mould and strength, and they were well inured to toil, no less than to the particular privations and dangers of a border life. Like most men of their years and condition, they were practised too in the wilds of Indian cunning; and though the Province of Connecticut, compared to other settlements, had suffered but little in this species of murderous warfare, they both had martial feats and perilous experiences of their own to recount, during the light labours of the long winter evenings.

Content crossed the court with a quick step, for, notwithstanding his steady unbelief, the image of his gentle wife posted on her outer watch hurried his movements. The rap he gave at the door, on reaching the apartment of those he sought, was loud as it was sudden.

“Who calls?” demanded a deep-toned and firm voice from within, at the first blow of the knuckles on the plank.

“Quit thy beds quickly, and come forth with the arms appointed for a sally.”

“That is soon done,” answered a stout woodsman, throwing open the door and standing before Content in the garments he had worn throughout the day. “We were just dreaming that the night was not to pass without a summons to the loops.”

“Hast seen aught?”

“Our eyes were not shut, more than those of others ; we saw him enter, that no man hath seen depart.”

“Come, fellow ; Whittal Ring would scarce give wiser speech than this cunning reply of thine. My wife is at the postern, and it is fit we go to relieve her watch. Thou wilt not forget the horns of powder, since it would not tell to our credit, were there service for the pieces, and we lacking in wherewithal to give them a second discharge.”

The hirelings obeyed, and as little time was necessary to arm those who never slept without weapons and ammunition within reach of their hands, Content was speedily followed by

his dependents. Ruth was found at her post, but when urged by her husband to declare what had passed in his absence, she was compelled to admit that, though the morn had come forth brighter and clearer from behind the clouds, she had seen nothing to add to her alarm.

“We will then lead the beast to his stall, and close our duty by setting a single watcher for the rest of the night,” said the husband. “Reuben shall keep the postern, while Eben and I will have a care for my father’s nag, not forgetting the carcass for the husking feast. Dost hear, deaf Dudley? cast the mutton upon the crupper of the beast, and follow to the stables.”

“Here has been no common workman at my office,” said the blunt Eben, who, though an ordinary farm labourer, according to an usage still very generally prevalent in the country, was also skilful in the craft of the butcher. “I have brought many a wether to his end, but this is the first sheep, within all my ex-

perience, that hath kept the fleece while a portion of the body has been in the pot! Lie there, poor Straight-Horns, if quiet thou canst lie after such a strange butchery. Reuben, I paid thee, as the sun rose, a Spanish piece in silver, for the trifle of debt that lay between us, in behalf of the good turn thou didst the shoes, which were none the better for the last hunt in the hills. Hast ever that pistareen about thee?"

This question, which was put in a lowered tone, and only to the ear of the party concerned, was answered in the affirmative.

"Give it me, lad; in the morning thou shalt be paid with usurer's interest."

Another summons from Content, who had now led the nag loaded with the carcass of the sheep without the postern, cut short the secret conference. Eben Dudley, having received the coin, hastened to follow. But the distance to the out-buildings was sufficient to enable him to effect his mysterious purpose without discovery. Whilst Content endeavoured to calm

the apprehensions of his wife, who still persisted in sharing his danger, by such reasons as he could on the instant command, the credulous Dudley placed the thin piece of silver between his teeth, and with a pressure that denoted the prodigious force of his jaws, caused it to assume a beaten and rounded shape. He then sily dropped the battered coin into the muzzle of his gun, taking care to secure its presence, until he himself should send it on its disenchanting message, by a wad torn from the lining of part of his vestments. Supported by this redoubtable auxiliary, the superstitious but still courageous borderer followed his companion, whistling a low air, that equally denoted his indifference to danger of an ordinary nature, and his sensibility to impressions of a less earthly character.

They who dwell in the older districts of America, where art and labour have united for generations to clear the earth of its inequalities, and to remove the vestiges of a state of

nature, can form but little idea of the thousand objects that may exist in a clearing, to startle the imagination of one who has admitted alarm, when seen in the doubtful light of even a cloudless moon. Still less can they who have never quitted the old world, and who, having only seen, can only imagine fields smooth as the surface of tranquil water, picture the effect produced by those lingering remnants, which may be likened to so many mouldering monuments of the fallen forest, scattered at such an hour over a broad surface of open land. Accustomed as they were to the sight, Content and his partner, excited by their fears, fancied each dark and distant stump a savage, and they passed no angle in the high and heavy fences, without throwing a jealous glance, to see that some enemy did not lie stretched within its shadows.

Still no new motive for apprehension arose during the brief period that the two adventurers were employed in administering to the

comfort of the Puritan's steed. The task was ended, the carcass of the slaughtered Straight-Horns had been secured, and Ruth was already urging her husband to return, when their attention was drawn to the attitude and mien of their companion.

"The man hath departed as he came," said Eben Dudley, who stood shaking his head in open doubt, before an empty stall; "here is no beast, though with these eyes did I see the half-wit bring hither a well filled measure of speckled oats, to feed the nag. He who favoured us with his presence at the supper and the thanksgiving, hath tired of his company before the hour of rest had come."

"The horse is truly wanting," said Content: "the man must needs be in exceeding haste to have ridden into the forest as the night grew deepest, and when the longest summer day would scarce bring a better hack than that he rode to another christian dwelling. There is reason for this industry, but it is enough that

it concerns us not. We will now seek our rest, in the certainty that One watcheth our slumbers whose vigilance can never fail."

Though man could not trust himself to sleep in that country without the security of bars and bolts, we have already had occasion to say, that property was guarded with but little care. The stable-door was merely closed by a wooden latch, and the party returned from this short sortie, with steps that were a little quickened by a sense of an uneasiness that beset them in forms suited to their several characters. But shelter was at hand, and it was speedily regained.

"Thou hast seen nothing?" said Content to Reuben Ring, who had been chosen for his quick eye, and a sagacity that was as remarkable as was his brother's impotency; "thou hast seen nothing at thy watch?"

"Nought unusual; and yet I like not yonder billet of wood, near to the fence against the knoll. If it were not so plainly a half-

burnt log, one might fancy there is life in it. But when fancy is at work the sight is keen. Once or twice, I have thought it seemed to be rolling towards the brook ; I am not, even now, certain that when first seen it did not lie eight or ten feet higher against the bank."

"It may be a living thing !"

"On the faith of a woodman's eye, it well may be," said Eben Dudley ; "but should it be haunted by a legion of wicked spirits, one may bring it to quiet from the loop at the nearest corner. Stand aside, Madam Heathcote," for the character and wealth of the proprietors of the valley, gave Ruth a claim to this term of respect among the labourers ; "let me thrust the piece through the—Stop ! there is an especial charm in the gun which it might be sinful to waste on such a creature. It may be no more than some sweet-toothed bear. I will answer for the charge at my own cost, if thou wilt lend me thy musket, Reuben Ring."

"It shall not be," said his master ; "one

known to my father hath this night entered our dwelling and fed at our board; if he hath departed in a way but little wont among those of this colony, yet hath he done no great wrong. I will go nigh, and examine with less risk of error."

There was, in this proposal, too much of that spirit of right-doing which governed all of those simple regions, to meet serious opposition. Content, supported by Eben Dudley, again quitted the postern, and proceeded, directly, though still not without sufficient caution, towards the point where the suspicious object lay. A bend in the fence had first brought it into view, for previously to reaching that point, its apparent direction might for some distance have been taken under shelter of the shadows of the rails, which at the immediate spot where it was seen, were turned suddenly in a line with the eyes of the spectators. It seemed as if the movements of those who approached were watched, for the instant they left the defences, the dark

object was assuredly motionless,—even the keen eye of Reuben Ring beginning to doubt whether some deception of vision had not led him, after all, to mistake a billet of wood for a creature of life.

But Content and his companion were not induced to change their determination. Even when within fifty feet of the object, though the moon fell full and brightly upon the surface, its character baffled conjecture. One affirmed it was the end of a charred log, many of which still lay scattered about the fields, and the other believed it some cringing animal of the woods. Twice Content raised his piece to fire, and as often did he let it fall in reluctance to do injury to even a quadruped of whose character he was ignorant. It is more than probable that his less considerate, and but half obedient companion would have decided the question soon after leaving the postern, had not the peculiar contents of his musket rendered him delicate of its uses.

“Look to thy weapons,” said the former, loosening his own hunting knife in its sheath. “We will draw near, and make certainty of what is doubtful.”

They did so, and the gun of Dudley was thrust rudely into the side of the object of their distrust, before it again betrayed life or motion. Then, indeed, as if further disguise was useless, an Indian lad of some fifteen years, rose deliberately to his feet, and stood before them in the sullen dignity of a captured warrior. Content hastily seized the stripling by an arm, and, followed by Eben, who occasionally quickened the footsteps of the prisoner by an impetus obtained from the breech of his own musket, they hurriedly returned within the defences.

“My life against that of Straight-Horns, which is now of no great value,” said Dudley, as he pushed the last bolt of the fastenings into its socket, “we hear no more of this red skin’s companions to-night. I never knew an Indian

raise his whoop, when a scout had fallen into the hands of the enemy."

"This may be true," returned the other, "and yet must a sleeping household be guarded. We may be brought to rely on the overlooking favour of Providence, working with the means of our own manhood, ere the sun shall arise."

Content was a man of few words, but one of exceeding steadiness and resolution in moments of need. He was perfectly aware that an Indian youth, like him he had captured, would not have been found in that place, and under the circumstances in which he was actually taken, without a design of sufficient magnitude to justify the hazard. The tender age of the stripling, too, forbade the belief that he was unaccompanied. But he silently agreed with his labouring man that the capture would probably cause the attack, if any such were meditated, to be deferred. He therefore instructed his wife to withdraw into

her chamber, while he took measures to defend the dwelling in the last emergency. Without giving any unnecessary alarm, a measure that would have produced less effect on an enemy without than the imposing stillness which now reigned within the defences, he ordered two or three more of the stoutest of his dependents to be summoned to the palisadoes. A keen scrutiny was made into the state of all the different outlets of the place; muskets were carefully examined; charges were given to be watchful, and regular sentinels were stationed within the shadows of the buildings, at points where, unseen themselves, they could look out in safety upon the fields.

Content then took his captive, with whom he had made no attempt to exchange a syllable, and led him to the block-house. The door which communicated with the basement of this building was always open, in readiness for refuge in the event of any sudden alarm. He entered, caused the lad to mount by a

ladder to the floor above, and then withdrawing the means of retreat, he turned the key without, in perfect confidence that his prisoner was secure.

Notwithstanding all this care, morning had nearly dawned before the prudent father and husband sought his pillow. His steadiness however had prevented the apprehensions, which kept his own eyes and those of his gentle partner so long open, from extending beyond the few whose services were, in such an emergency, deemed indispensable to safety. Towards the last watches of the night only, did the images of the scenes through which they had just passed become dim and confused, and then both husband and wife slept soundly, and, happily, without disturbance.

CHAPTER V.

“Are you so brave? I’ll have you talked with anon.”

Coriolanus.

THE axe and the brand had been early and effectually used immediately around the dwelling of the Heathcotes. A double object had been gained by removing most of the vestiges of the forest from the vicinity of the building; the necessary improvements were executed with greater facility: and, a consideration of no small importance, the cover, which the American

savage is known to seek in his attacks, was thrown to a distance that greatly diminished the danger of a surprise.

Favoured by the advantage which had been obtained by this foresight, and by the brilliancy of a night that soon emulated the brightness of day, the duty of Eben Dudley and of his associate on the watch was rendered easy of accomplishment. Indeed, so secure did they become towards morning, chiefly on account of the capture of the Indian lad, that more than once, eyes that should have been differently employed, yielded to the drowsiness of the hour and to habit, or were only opened at intervals that left their owners in some doubt as to the passage of the intermediate time. But no sooner did the signs of day approach, than, agreeably to their instructions, the watchers sought their beds, and for an hour or two, they slept soundly and without fear.

When his father had closed the prayers of the morning, Content, in the midst of the as-

sembled family, communicated as many of the incidents of the past night, as in his judgment seemed necessary. His discretion limited the narrative to the capture of the native youth, and to the manner in which he had ordered the watch for the security of the family. On the subject of his own excursion to the forest, and all connected therewith, he was guardedly silent.

It is unnecessary to relate the manner in which this startling information was received. The cold and reserved brow of the Puritan became still more thoughtful; the young men looked grave but resolute; the maidens of the household grew pale, shuddered, and whispered hurriedly together; while the little Ruth, and a female child of nearly her own age, named Martha, clung close to the side of the mistress of the family, who having nothing new to learn, had taught herself to assume the appearance of a resolution she was far from feeling.

The first visitation which befel the listeners,

after their eager ears had drunk in the intelligence Content so briefly imparted, was a renewal of the spiritual strivings of his father in the form of prayer. A particular petition was put up in quest of light on their future proceedings, for mercy on all men, for a better mind to those who wandered through the wilderness seeking victims of their wrath, for the gifts of grace on the heathen, and finally for victory over all their carnal enemies, let them come whence or in what aspect they might.

Fortified by these additional exercises, old Mark next made himself master of all the signs and evidences of the approach of danger, by a more rigid and minute inquiry into the visible circumstances of the arrest of the young savage. Content received a merited and grateful reward for his prudence, in the approbation of one whom he still continued to revere, with a mental dependance little less than that with which he had leaned on his father's wisdom in the days of his childhood.

“Thou hast done well and wisely,” said his father; “but more remaineth to be performed by thy wisdom and fortitude. We have had tidings that the heathen near the Providence plantations are unquiet, and that they are lending their minds to wicked counsellors. We are not to sleep in too much security, because a forest journey of a few days lies between their villages and our own clearing. Bring forth the captive; I will question him on the matter of this visit.”

Until now, so much did the fears of all turn towards the enemies who were believed to be lurking near, that little thought had been bestowed on the prisoner in the block-house. Content, who well knew the invincible resolution, no less than the art, of an Indian, had forborne to question him when taken, for he believed the time to be better suited to vigilant action, than to interrogatories which the character of the boy was likely to render perfectly useless. He now proceeded, however, with an interest that

began to quicken as circumstances rendered its indulgence less unsuitable, to seek his captive, in order to bring him before the searching ordeal of his father's authority.

The key of the lower door of the blockhouse hung where it had been deposited; the ladder was replaced, and Content mounted quietly to the apartment where he had placed his captive. The room was the lowest of three that the building contained, all being above that which might be termed its basement. The latter, having no aperture but its door, was a dark, hexagonal space, partly filled with such articles as might be needed in the event of an alarm, and which, at the same time, were frequently required for the purposes of domestic use. In the centre of the area was a deep well, so fitted and protected by a wall of stone, as to admit of water being drawn into the rooms above. The door itself was of massive hewn timber. The squared logs of the upper stories projected a little beyond the stone-work of the basement, the second

tier of the timbers containing a few loops, out of which missiles might be discharged downwards, on any assailants that approached nearer than should be deemed safe for the security of the basement. As has been stated, the two principal stories were perforated with long narrow slits through the timber, which answered the double purposes of windows and loop-holes. Though the apartments were so evidently arranged for defence, the plain domestic furniture they contained, was suited to the wants of the family, should they be driven to the building for refuge. There was also an apartment in the roof, or attic, as already mentioned, but it scarcely entered into the more important uses of the block-house. Still the advantage which it received from its elevation was not overlooked. A small cannon, of a kind once known and much used under the name of grasshoppers, had been raised to the place, and time had been when it was rightly considered as of the last importance to the safety of the inmates of the

dwelling. For some years its muzzle had been seen, by all the straggling aborigines who visited the valley, frowning through one of those openings which were now converted into glazed windows; and there is reason to think, that the reputation which the little piece of ordnance thus silently obtained, had a powerful agency in so long preserving, unmolested, the peace of the valley.

The word unmolested is perhaps too strong. More than one alarm had in fact occurred, though no positive acts of violence had ever been committed within the limits which the Puritan claimed as his own. On only one occasion, however, did matters proceed so far that the veteran had been induced to take his post in this warlike attic, where, there is little doubt, had occasion further offered for his services, he would have made a suitable display of his knowledge in the science of gunnery. But the simple history of the Wish-Ton-Wish had furnished another evidence of a political truth, which cannot

be too often presented to the attention of our countrymen ; we mean that the best preservative of peace is preparation for war. In the case before us, the hostile attitude assumed by old Mark and his dependents had effected all that was desirable, without proceeding to the extremity of shedding blood. Such peaceful triumphs were far more in accordance with the present principles of the Puritan, than it would have been with the reckless temper which had governed his youth. In the quaint and fanatical humour of the times, he had held a family thanksgiving around the instrument of their security, and from that moment the room itself became a favourite resorting place for the old soldier. Thither he often mounted, even in the hours of deep night, to indulge in those secret spiritual exercises which formed the chiefest solace, and seemingly, indeed, the great employment of his life. In consequence of this habit, the attic of the block-house came in time to be considered sacred to the uses of the

master of the valley. The care and thought of Content had gradually supplied it with many conveniences that might contribute to the personal comfort of his father, while his spirit was engaged in these mental conflicts. At length, the old man was known to use the mattress, that, among other things, it now contained, and to pass the time between the setting and rising of the sun in its solitude. The aperture originally cut for the exhibition of the grasshopper, had been glazed, and no article of comfort, which was once caused to mount the difficult ladder that led to the chamber, was ever seen to descend.

There was something in the austere sanctity of old Mark Heathcote that was favourable to the practices of an anchorite. The youths of the dwelling regarded his unbending brow, and the undisturbed gravity of the eye it shadowed, with a respect akin to awe. Had the genuine benevolence of his character been less tried, or had he mingled in active life, at a later period,

it might readily have been his fate to have shared in the persecution which his countrymen heaped on those who were believed to deal with influences it is thought impious to exercise. Under actual circumstances, however, the sentiment went no farther than a deep and universal reverence, that left its object and the neglected little piece of artillery, to the quiet possession of an apartment, to invade which would have been deemed an act bordering on sacrilege.

The business of Content, on the occasion which caused his present visit to the edifice, whose history and description we have thought it expedient thus to give at some length, led him no farther than to the lowest of its more military apartments. On raising the trap, for the first time a feeling of doubt came over him, as to the propriety of having left the boy so long unsolaced by words of kindness, or by deeds of charity. It was appeased by observing that his

concern was awakened in behalf of one whose spirit was quite equal to sustain greater trials.

The young Indian stood before one of the loops, looking out upon that distant forest in which he had so lately roamed at liberty, with a gaze too rivetted to turn aside even at the interruption occasioned by the presence of his captor.

“Come from thy prison, child,” said Content, in the tones of mildness; “whatever may have been thy motive in lurking around this dwelling, thou art human, and must know human wants; come forth, and receive food; none here will harm thee.”

The language of commiseration is universal. Though the words of the speaker were evidently unintelligible to him for whose ears they were intended, their import was conveyed in the kindness of the accents. The eyes of the boy turned slowly from the view of the woods, and he looked his captor, long and steadily, in the face. Content now, indeed, discovered that

he had spoken in a language that was unknown to his captive, and he endeavoured, by gestures of kindness, to invite the lad to follow. He was silently and quietly obeyed. On reaching the court, however, the prudence of a border proprietor in some degree overcame his feelings of compassion.

“Bring hither yon tether,” he said to Whittal* Ring, who at the moment was passing towards the stables; “here is one wild as the most untamed of thy colts. Man is of our nature and of our spirit, let him be of what colour it may have pleased Providence to stamp his features; but he who would have a young savage in his keeping on the morrow, must look sharply to his limbs to-day.”

The lad submitted quietly until a turn of the rope was passed around one of his arms; but when Content was fain to complete the work by bringing the other limb into the same state of subjection, the boy glided from his grasp, and cast the fetters from him in disdain. This

act of decided resistance was however followed by no effort to escape. The moment his person was released from a confinement which he probably considered as implying distrust of his ability to endure pain with the fortitude of a warrior, the lad turned quietly and proudly to his captor, and, with an eye in which scorn and haughtiness were alike glowing, seemed to defy the fulness of his anger.

“Be it so,” resumed the equal-minded Content; “if thou likest not the bonds, which, notwithstanding the pride of man, are often healthful to the body, keep then the use of thy limbs, and see that they do no mischief. Whittal, look thou to the postern, and remember it is forbidden to go afield, until my father hath had this heathen under examination. The cub is seldom found far from the cunning of the aged bear.”

He then made a sign to the boy to follow, and proceeded to the apartment where his

father, surrounded by most of the family, awaited their coming. Uncompromising domestic discipline was one of the striking characteristics of the sway of the Puritans. That austerity of manner which was thought to mark a sense of a fallen and probationary state, was early taught; for among a people who deemed all mirth a sinful levity, the practice of self-command would readily come to be esteemed the basis of virtue. But whatever might have been the peculiar merit of Mark Heathcote and his household, in this particular, it was likely to be exceeded by the exhibition of the same quality in the youth who had so strangely become their captive.

We have already said that this child of the woods might have seen some fifteen years. Though he had shot upwards like a vigorous and thrifty plant, and with the freedom of a thriving sapling in his native forests, rearing its branches towards the light, his stature had

not yet reached that of man. In height, form, and attitudes, he was a model of active, natural, and graceful boyhood. But while his limbs were so fair in their proportions, they were scarcely muscular; still every movement exhibited a freedom and ease, which announced the grace of childhood, without the smallest evidence of that restraint which creeps into our air as the factitious feelings of later life begin to assert their influence. The smooth, rounded trunk of the mountain ash is not more upright and free from blemish, than was the figure of the boy, who moved into the curious circle, that opened for his entrance and closed against his retreat, with the steadiness of one who came to bestow, instead of appearing to receive, judgment.

“I will question him,” said old Mark Heathcote, attentively regarding the keen and settled eye that met his long, stern gaze as steadily as a less intelligent creature of the

woods would return the look of man—"I will question him; and perchance fear will wring from his lips a confession of the evil that he and his have meditated against me and mine."

"I think he is ignorant of our forms of speech," returned Content: "for the words of neither kindness nor anger will force him to a change of feature."

"It is then meet that we commence by asking Him who hath the secret to open all hearts to be our assistant." The Puritan then raised his voice in a short and exceedingly particular petition, in which he implored the Ruler of the Universe to interpret his meaning, in the forthcoming examination, in a manner that, had his request been granted, would have savoured not a little of the miraculous. With this preparation he proceeded directly to his task. But neither questions, signs, nor prayer produced the slightest visible effect. The boy

gazed at the rigid and austere countenance of his interrogator while the words were issuing from his lips ; but the instant they ceased, his searching and quick eye rolled over the different curious faces by which he was hemmed in, as if he trusted more to the sense of sight than that of hearing, for the information he naturally sought concerning his future lot. It was found impossible to obtain from him gesture or sound, that should betray either the purport of his questionable visit, his own personal appellation, or that of his tribe.

“ I have been among the red skins of the Providence Plantations,” Eben Dudley at length ventured to observe ; “ and their language, though but a crooked and irrational jargon, is not unknown to me. With the leave of all present,” he continued, regarding the Puritan in a manner to betray that this general term meant him alone—“ with the leave of all present,

I will put it to the younker, in such a fashion that he will be glad to answer."

Receiving a look of assent, the borderer uttered certain uncouth and guttural sounds, which, notwithstanding they entirely failed of their effect, he stoutly maintained were the ordinary terms of salutation among the people to whom the prisoner was supposed to belong.

"I know him to be a Narragansett," continued Eben, reddening with vexation at his defeat, and throwing a glance of no peculiar amity at the youth who had so palpably refuted his claim to skill in the Indian tongues ; "you see he hath the shells of the sea side worked into the bordering of his moccasins : and besides this sign, which is certain as that night hath its stars, he beareth the look of a chief that was slain by the Pequods, at the wish of us Christians, after an affair, in which,

whether it was well done or ill done, I did some part of the work myself."

"And how call you that chief?" demanded Mark.

"Why he had various names, according to the business he was on. To some he was known as the Leaping Panther, for he was a man of an extraordinary jump; and others again used to style him Pepperage, since there was a saying that neither bullet nor sword could enter his body; though that was a mistake, as his death hath fully proven. But his real name, according to the uses and sounds of his own people, was My Anthony Mow."

"My Anthony Mow!"

"Yes; My, meaning that he was their chief; Anthony being the given name, and Mow that of the breed of which he came;" rejoined Eben, with confidence, satisfied that he had finally produced a sufficiently sonorous appellative, and a perfectly lucid etymology. But criticism was diverted from its aim by the

action of the prisoner, as these equivocal sounds struck his ear. Ruth recoiled, and clasped her little namesake closer to her side, when she saw the dazzling brightness of his glowing eyes, and the sudden and expressive dilation of his nostrils. For a moment, his lips were compressed with more than the usual force of Indian gravity, and then they slightly severed. A low, soft, and, as even the startled matron was obliged to confess, a plaintive sound issued from between them, repeating mournfully—

“Miantonimoh!”

The word was uttered with a distinct, but deeply guttural enunciation.

“The child mourneth for its parent,” exclaimed the sensitive mother. “The hand that slew the warrior may have done an evil deed!”

“I see the evident and fore-ordering will of a wise Providence in this,” said Mark Heath-

cote, with solemnity. "The youth hath been deprived of one who might have enticed him still deeper into the bonds of the heathen, and hither hath he been led in order to be placed upon the straight and narrow path. He shall become a dweller among mine, and we will strive against the evil of his mind until instruction shall prevail. Let him be fed and nurtured, equally with the things of life and the things of the world, for who knoweth that which is designed in his behalf!"

If there were more of faith than of rational conclusion in this opinion of the old Puritan, there was no external evidence to contradict it. While the examination of the boy was going on in the dwelling, a keen scrutiny had taken place in the out-buildings, and in the adjacent fields. Those engaged in this duty soon returned to say, that not the smallest trace of an ambush was visible about the place, and as the captive himself had no weapons of hos-

tility, even Ruth began to hope that the mysterious conceptions of her father on the subject were not entirely delusive. The captive was now fed, and old Mark was on the point of making a proper beginning in the task he had so gladly assumed, by an up-offering of thanks, when Whittal Ring broke rudely into the room and disturbed the solemnity of his preparations by a sudden and boisterous outcry.

“Away with scythe and sickle,” shouted the witling; “it’s many a day since the fields of Wish-Ton-Wish have been trodden down by horsemen in buff jerkins, or ambushed by creeping Wampanoags.”

“There is danger at hand!” exclaimed the sensitive Ruth. “Husband, the warning was timely.”

“Here are truly some riding from the forest, and drawing nigh to the dwellings; but as they are seemingly men of our kind and faith, we

have need rather of rejoicing than terror. They bear the air of messengers from the River."

Mark Heathcote listened with surprise, and perhaps with a momentary uneasiness; but all emotion passed away on the instant, for one so disciplined in mind rarely permitted any outward exposure of his secret thoughts. The Puritan calmly issued an order to replace the prisoner in the block-house, assigning the upper of the two principal floors for his keeping; and then he prepared himself to receive guests that were little wont to disturb the quiet of his secluded valley. He was still in the act of giving forth the necessary mandates, when the tramp of horses was heard in the court, and he was summoned to the door to greet his unknown visitors.

"We have reached Wish-Ton-Wish, and the dwelling of Captain Mark Heathcote," said one, who appeared, by his air and better attire,

to be the principal of four that composed the party.

“ By the favour of Providence, I call myself the unworthy owner of this place of refuge.”

“ Then a subject so loyal, and a man who hath so long proved himself faithful in the wilderness, will not turn from his door the agents of his Anointed Master.”

“ There is One greater than any of earth, who hath taught us to leave the latch free. I pray you to alight, and to partake of that we can offer.”

With this courteous but quaint explanation the horsemen dismounted, and giving their steeds into the keeping of the labourers of the farm, they entered the dwelling.

While the maidens of Ruth were preparing a repast suited to the hour and to the quality of the guests, Mark and his son had abundant

opportunity to examine the appearance of the strangers. They were men who seemed to wear visages peculiarly adapted to the characters of their entertainers, being in truth so singularly demure and grave in aspect, as to excite some suspicion of their being newly converted zealots to the mortifying customs of the colony. Notwithstanding their extraordinary gravity, and contrary to the usages of those regions, too, they bore about their persons certain evidence of being used to the fashions of the other hemisphere. The pistols attached to their saddle bows, and other accoutrements of a warlike aspect, would perhaps have attracted no observation, had they not been accompanied by a fashion in the doublet, the hat, and the boot, that denoted a greater intercourse with the mother country than was usual among the less sophisticated natives of those regions. None traversed the forests without the means of defence; but, on the other hand, few wore the hostile implements

with so much of a worldly air, or with so many minor particularities of some recent caprice in fashion. As they had however announced themselves to be officers of the King, they who of necessity must be chiefly concerned in the object of their visit, patiently awaited the pleasure of the strangers, to learn why duty had called them so far from all the more ordinary haunts of men : for, like the native owners of the soil, the self-restrained religionists appeared to reckon an indiscreet haste, in any thing, among the more unmanly weaknesses. Nothing for the first half hour of their visit escaped the guarded lips of men evidently well skilled in their present duty, which might lead to a clue of its purport. The morning meal passed almost without discourse, and one of the party had arisen with the professed object of looking to their steeds, before he who seemed the chief led the conversation to a subject, that, by its political bearing, might, in some degree, be sup-

posed to have a remote connexion with the principal object of his journey to that sequestered valley.

“ Have the tidings of the gracious boon that hath lately flowed from the favour of the King, reached this distant settlement ?” asked the principal personage, one that wore a far less military air than a younger companion, who, by his confident mien, appeared to be the second in authority.

“ To what boon hath thy words import ?” demanded the Puritan, turning a glance of the eye at his son and daughter, together with the others in hearing, as if to admonish them to be prudent.

“ I speak of the Royal Charter, by which the people on the banks of the Connecticut, and they of the Colony of New Haven, are henceforth permitted to unite in government ; granting them liberty of conscience, and great freedom of self-controul.”

“ Such a gift were worthy of a King ! Hath Charles done this ? ”

“ That hath he, and much more that is fitting in a kind and royal mind. The realm is finally freed from the abuses of usurpers, and power now resteth in the hands of a race long set apart for its privileges.”

“ It is to be wished that practice shall render them expert and sage in its uses,” rejoined Mark, somewhat drily.

“ It is a merry Prince ! and one but little given to the study and exercises of his martyred father ; but he hath great cunning in discourse, and few around his dread person have keener wit, or more ready tongue.”

Mark bowed his head in silence, seemingly little disposed to push the discussion of his earthly master's qualities to a conclusion that might prove offensive to so loyal an admirer. One inclining to suspicion would have seen, or thought he saw, certain equivocal glances from

the stranger, while he was thus lauding the vivacious qualities of the restored monarch, which should denote a desire to detect how far the eulogiums might be grateful to his host. He acquiesced, however, in the wishes of the Puritan, though whether understandingly, or without design, it would have been difficult to say, and submitted to change the discourse.

“It is likely, by thy presence, that tidings have reached the Colonies from home,” said Content, who understood, by the severe and reserved expression of his father’s features, that it was a fitting time for him to interpose.

“There is one arrived in the Bay, within the month, by means of a King’s frigate; but no trader hath yet passed between the countries, except the ship which maketh the annual voyage from Bristol to Boston.”

“And he who hath arrived; doth he come in authority?” demanded Mark; “or is he

merely another servant of the Lord, seeking to rear his tabernacle in the wilderness?"

“Thou shalt know the nature of his errand,” returned the stranger, casting a glance of malicious intelligence obliquely towards his companions, at the same time that he arose and placed in the hand of his host a commission which evidently bore the Seal of State. “It is expected that all aid will be given to one bearing this warranty, by a subject of a loyalty so approved as that of Captain Mark Heathcote.”

CHAPTER VI.

“ But, by your leave,
I am an officer of state, and come
To speak with ——”

Coriolanus.

NOTWITHSTANDING the sharp look which the Messenger of the Crown deliberately and now openly fastened on the master of Wish-Ton-Wish, while the latter was reading the instrument that was placed before his eyes, there was no evidence of uneasiness to be detected in the unmoved features of the latter.

Mark Heathcote had too long schooled his passions to suffer an unseemly manifestation of surprise to escape him, and he was by nature a man of far too much nerve to betray alarm at any trifling exhibition of danger. Returning the parchment to the other, he said, with unmoved calmness, to his son—

“ We must open wide the doors of Wish-Ton-Wish. Here is one charged with authority to look into the secrets of all the dwellings of the colony.” Then turning with dignity to the agent of the Crown, he added, “ Thou hadst better commence thy duty in season, for we are many, and occupy much space.”

The face of the stranger flushed a little ; it might have been with shame for the vocation in which he had come so far, or it might have been in resentment at so direct a hint that the sooner his disagreeable office should be ended, the better it would please his host. Still he betrayed no intention of shrinking from its per-

formance. On the contrary, discarding somewhat of that subdued manner which he had probably thought it politic to assume, while sounding the opinions of one so rigid, he broke out rather suddenly in the exhibition of a humour somewhat better suited to the tastes of him he served.

“Come, then,” he cried, winking at his companions, “since doors are opened, it would speak ill of our breeding should we refuse to enter. Captain Heathcote has been a soldier, and he knows how to excuse a traveller’s freedom. Surely one who has tasted of the pleasures of the camp, must weary at times of this sylvan life !”

“The steadfast in faith weary not, though the road be long, and the wayfaring grievous.”

“Hum—’tis pity that the journeying between merry England and these Colonies is not more brisk. I do not presume to instruct a gentleman who is my senior, and peradventure

my better, but opportunity is every thing in a man's fortunes. It were charity to let you know, worthy Sir, that opinions have changed at home : it is full a twelvemonth since I have heard a line of the Psalms, or a verse of St. Paul quoted, in discourse ; at least by men who are at all esteemed for their discretion."

" This change in the fashion of speech may better suit thy earthly than thy heavenly master," said Mark Heathcote, sternly.

" Well, well, that peace may exist between us, we will not bandy words about a text more or less, if we may escape the sermon," rejoined the stranger, no longer affecting restraint, but laughing with sufficient freedom at his own conceit ; a species of enjoyment in which his companions mingled with great good will, and without much deference to the humour of those under whose roof they found themselves.

A small glowing spot appeared on the pale cheek of the Puritan, and disappeared again, like

some transient deception produced by the play of light. Even the meek eye of Content kindled at the insult ; but, like his father, the practice of self-denial, and a never slumbering consciousness of his own imperfections, smothered the momentary exhibition of displeasure.

“ If thou hast authority to look into the secret places of our habitations, do thy office,” he said, with a peculiarity of tone, which served to remind the other, that though he bore the commission of the Stuart, he was in an extremity of his empire, where even the authority of a king lost some of its value.

Affecting to be, and possibly in reality conscious of his indiscretion, the stranger hastily disposed himself to the execution of his duty.

“ It would be a great and a pain-saving movement,” he said, “ were we to assemble the household in one apartment. The government at home would be glad to hear something of the quality of its lieges in this distant quarter.

Thou hast doubtless a bell to summon the flocks at stated periods."

"Our people are yet near the dwelling," returned Content: "if it be thy pleasure, none shall be absent from the search."

Gathering from the eye of the other that he was serious in this wish, the quiet colonist proceeded to the gate, and placing a shell to his mouth, blew one of those blasts that are so often heard in the forests, summoning families to their homes, and which are alike used as the signals of peaceful recal, or of alarm. The sound soon brought all within hearing to the court, whither the Puritan and his unpleasant guests now repaired, as to the spot best suited to the purposes of the latter.

"Hallam," said the principal personage of the four visitors, addressing him, who might once have been, if he were not still, some subaltern in the forces of the crown, for he was attired in a manner that bespoke him but a half-disguised

dragoon, "I leave thee to entertain this goodly assemblage. Thou mayest pass the time in discoursing on the vanities of the world, of which I believe few are better qualified to speak understandingly than thyself; or a few words of admonition to hold fast to the faith would come with fitting weight from thy lips. But look to it, that none of thy flock wander; for here must every creature of them remain, stationary as the indiscreet partner of Lot, till I have cast an eye into all the cunning places of their abode. So set wit at work, and show thy breeding as an entertainer."

After this irreverent charge to his subordinate, the speaker signified to Content and his father, that he and his remaining attendant would proceed to a more minute examination of the premises.

When Mark Heathcote saw that the man who had so rudely broken in upon the peaceful habits of his family was ready to proceed,

he advanced steadily in his front, like one who boldly invited inquiry, and by a grave gesture desired him to follow. The stranger, perhaps, as much from habit as from any settled design, first cast a free glance around at the bevy of fluttered maidens, leered even upon the modest and meek-eyed Ruth herself, and then took the direction indicated by him who had so unhesitatingly assumed the office of a guide.

The object of this examination still remained a secret between those who made it, and the Puritan, who had probably found its motive in the written warranty which had been submitted to his inspection. That it proceeded from fitting authority, none might doubt ; and that it was in some manner connected with the events that were known to have wrought so sudden and so great a change in the government of the mother country, all believed probable. Notwithstanding the seeming mystery of the procedure, the search was not the less

rigid. Few habitations, of any size or pretension, were erected in those times, which did not contain certain secret places, where valuables and even persons might be concealed at need. The strangers displayed great familiarity with the nature and ordinary positions of these private recesses. Not a chest, a closet, or even a drawer of size, escaped their vigilance, nor was there a plank that sounded hollow, but the master of the valley was called on to explain the cause. In one or two instances, boards were wrested violently from their fastenings, and the cavities beneath were explored, with a wariness that increased as the investigation proceeded without success.

The strangers appeared irritated by their failure. An hour passed in the keenest scrutiny, and nothing had transpired which brought them any nearer to their object. That they had commenced the search with more than usually confident anticipations of a favourable

result, might have been gathered from the boldness of tone assumed by their chief, and the pointed personal allusions in which, from time to time, he indulged, often too freely, and always at some expense to the loyalty of the Heathcotes. But when he had completed the circuit of the buildings, having entered all parts from their cellars to the garrets, his spleen became so strong as, in some degree, to get the better of a certain parade of discretion, which he had hitherto managed to maintain in the midst of all his levity.

“Hast seen nothing, Mr. Hallam?” he demanded of the individual left on watch, as they crossed the court in retiring from the last of the outbuildings; “or have those traces which led us to this distant settlement proved false? Captain Heathcote, you have seen that we come not without sufficient warranty, and it is in my power to say we come not, without sufficient——”

Checking himself, as if about to utter more than was prudent, he suddenly cast an eye on the block-house and demanded its uses.

“It is, as thou seest, a building erected for the purposes of defence,” replied Mark ; “one to which, in the event of an inroad of the savages, the family may fly for refuge.”

“Ah! these citadels are not unknown to me. I have met with others during my journey, but none so formidable or so military as this. It hath a soldier for its governor, and should hold out for a reasonable siege. Being a place of pretension, we will look closer into its mystery.”

He then signified an intention to close the search by an examination of this edifice. Content unhesitatingly threw open its door, and invited him to enter.

“On the word of one who, though now engaged in a more peaceful calling, has been

a campaigner in his time, 'twould be no child's play to carry this tower without artillery. Had thy spies given notice of our approach, Captain Heathcote, the entrance might have been more difficult than we now find it. We have a ladder, here ! Where the means of mounting are found, there must be something to tempt one to ascend. I will taste your forest air from an upper room."

" You will find the apartment above, like this below, merely provided for the security of the unoffending dwellers of the habitations," said Content, while he quietly arranged the ladder before the trap, and then led the way himself to the floor above.

" Here have we loops for the musketoons," cried the stranger, looking about him, understandingly, " and reasonable defences against shot. Thou hast not forgotten thy art, Captain Heathcote, and I consider myself fortunate in having entered thy fortress by surprise, or, I

should rather say, in amity, since the peace is not yet broken between us. But why have we so much of household gear in a place so evidently equipped for war?"

"Thou forgettest that women and children may be driven to this block for a residence," replied Content. "It would shew little discretion to neglect matters that might be useful to their wants."

"Is there trouble with the savages?" demanded the stranger, a little quickly; "the gossips of the colony bade us fear nothing on that head."

"One cannot say at what hour creatures trained in their wild natures may choose to rise. The dwellers on the borders, therefore, never neglect a fitting caution."

"Hist!" interrupted the stranger; "I hear a footstep above. Ha! the scent will prove true at last! Hilloa, Master Hallam!" he cried from one of the loops, "let thy statues of salt

dissolve, and come hither to the tower. Here is work for a regiment ; for well do we know the nature of that we are to deal with."

The sentinel in the court shouted to his companion in the stables, and then, openly and boisterously exulting in the prospects of a final success to a search, which had hitherto given them useless employment throughout many a long day and weary ride, they rushed together to the block-house.

"Now, worthy lieges of a gracious master," said the leader, when he perceived himself backed by all his armed followers, and speaking with the air of a man flushed with success, "now quickly provide the means of mounting to the upper story. I have thrice heard the tread of man moving across that floor ; though it hath been light and wary, the planks are tell-tales, and have not had their schooling."

Content heard the request, which was uttered sufficiently in the manner of an order, perfectly

unmoved. Without betraying either hesitation or concern, he disposed himself to comply. Drawing the light ladder through the trap below, he placed it against the one above him, and ascending, he raised the door. He then returned to the floor beneath, making a quiet gesture to imply that they who chose might mount. But the strangers regarded each other with very visible doubts. Neither of the inferiors seemed disposed to precede his chief, and the latter evidently hesitated as to the order in which it was meet to make the necessary advance.

“Is there no other manner of mounting, but by this narrow ascent?” he asked.

“None: thou wilt find the ladder secure, and of no difficult height. It is intended for the use of women and children.”

“Ay,” muttered the officer, “but your women and children are not called upon to confront the devil in a human form. Fellows, are thy weapons in serviceable condition? Here

may be need of spirit, ere we get our——Hist !
by the Divine Right of our Gracious Master !
there is truly one stirring above. Harkee, my
friend ; thou knowest the road so well, we will
choose to follow thy conduct.”

Content, who seldom permitted ordinary events to disturb the equanimity of his temper, quietly assented, and led the way up the ladder, like one who saw no ground for apprehension in the undertaking. The agent of the crown sprang after him, taking care to keep as near as possible to the person of his leader, and calling to his inferiors to lose no time in backing him with their support. The whole mounted through the trap, with an alacrity nothing short of that with which they would have pressed through a dangerous breach : nor did either of the four take time to survey the lodgement he had made, until the whole party was standing in array, with hands grasping the handles of

their pistols, or seeking, as it were, instinctively the hilts of their broadswords.

“By the dark visage of the Stuart!” exclaimed the principal personage, after satisfying himself by a long and disappointed gaze, that what he said was true, “here is nought but an unarmed savage boy!”

“Didst expect to meet else?” demanded the still unmoved Content.

“Hum—that which we expected to meet is sufficiently known to the quaint old gentleman below, and to our own good wisdom. If thou doubtest of our right to look into thy very hearts, warranty for that we do can be forthcoming. King Charles hath little cause to be tender of his mercies to the dwellers of these colonies, who lent but too willing ears to the whinings and hypocrisies of the wolves in sheep’s clothing, of whom old England hath now so happily gotten rid. Thy buildings shall again be

rummaged from the bricks of the chimney tops to the corner stone in thy cellars, unless deceit and rebellious cunning shall be abandoned, and the truth proclaimed with the openness and fairness of bold-speaking Englishmen."

"I know not what is called the fairness of bold-speaking Englishmen, since fairness of speech is not a quality of one people, or of one land; but well I do know that deceit is sinful, and little of it, I humbly trust, is practised in this settlement. I am ignorant of what is sought, and therefore it cannot be that I meditate treachery."

"Thou hearest, Hallam; he reasoneth on a matter that toucheth the peace and safety of the King!" cried the other, his arrogance of manner increasing with the anger of disappointment. "But why is this dark-skinned boy a prisoner? Dost dare to constitute thyself a sovereign over the natives of this continent,

and affect to have shackles and dungeons for such as meet thy displeasure."

"The lad is in truth a captive; but he has been taken in defence of life, and hath little to complain of, more than loss of freedom."

"I will inquire deeply into this proceeding. Though commissioned on an errand of different interest, yet, as one trusted in a matter of moment, I take upon me the office of protecting every oppressed subject of the crown. There may grow discoveries out of this practice, Hallam, fit to go before the council itself."

"Thou wilt find but little here, worthy of the time and attention of those burthened with the care of a nation," returned Content. "The youthful heathen was found lurking near our habitations the past night, and he is kept where thou seest, that he may not carry the tidings of our condition to his people, who

are, doubtless, outlying in the forest, waiting for the fit moment to work their evil."

"How meanest thou!" hastily exclaimed the other; "at hand in the forest, didst say?"

"There can be little doubt. One young as this would scarce be found distant from the warriors of his tribe; and that the more especially, as he was taken in the commission of an ambush."

"I hope thy people are not without good provision of arms, and other sufficient muniments of resistance. I trust the palisadoes are firm, and the posterns ingeniously defended."

"We look with a diligent eye to our safety; for it is well known to us dwellers on the borders, that there is little security but in untiring watchfulness. The young men were at the gates until the morning, and we did intend to make a strong scouting into the woods as the day advanced, in order to look for those signs that may lead us to conclusions on the number

and purposes of those by whom we are environed, had not thy visit called us to other duties."

"And why so tardy in speaking of this intent?" demanded the agent of the King, leading the way down the ladder with suspicious haste. "It is a commendable prudence, and must not be delayed. I take upon me the responsibility of commanding that all proper care be had in defence of the weaker subjects of the crown who are here collected. Are our roadsters well replenished, Hallam? Duty, as thou sayest, is an imperative master; it recalls us more into the heart of the colony. I would it might shortly point the way to Europe!" he muttered as he reached the ground. "Go, fellows; see to our beasts, and let them be speedily prepared for departure."

The attendants, though men of sufficient spirit in open war, and when it was to be exercised in a fashion to which they were accus-

tomed, had, like other mortals, a wholesome deference for unknown and terrific looking danger. It is a well-known truth, and one that has been proved by the experience of two centuries, that while the European soldier has ever been readiest to have recourse to the assistance of the terrible warrior of the American forest, he has, in nearly every instance, when retaliation or accident has made him the object instead of the spectator of the ruthless nature of his warfare, betrayed the most salutary, and frequently the most abject and ludicrous apprehension of the prowess of his ally. While Content, therefore, looked so steadily, though still seriously, at the peculiar danger in which he was placed, the four strangers seemingly saw all of its horrors without any of the known means of avoiding them. Their chief quickly abandoned the insolence of office, and the tone of disappointment, for a mien of greater courtesy: and as policy is often seen suddenly to

change the sentiments of even more pretending personages, when interests assume a new aspect, so did his language rapidly take a character of conciliation and courtesy.

The hand-maidens were no longer leered at; the mistress of the dwelling was treated with marked deference: and the air of deep respect, with which even the principal of the party addressed the aged Puritan, bordered on an exhibition of commendable reverence. Something was said in the way of apology for the disagreeable obligations of duty, and of a difference between a manner that was assumed to answer secret purposes, and that which nature and a sense of right would dictate: but neither Mark nor his son appeared to have sufficient interest in the motives of their visitors, to put them to the trouble of repeating explanations, that were as awkward to those who uttered them, as they were unnecessary to those who listened.

So far from offering any further obstacle to the movements of the family, the borderers were seriously urged to pursue their previous intentions of thoroughly examining the woods. The dwelling was accordingly entrusted, under the orders of the Puritan, to the keeping of about half the labourers, assisted by the Europeans, who clung with instinctive attachment to the possession of the block-house; their leader repeatedly and rightly enough declaring that, though ready at all times to risk life on a plain, he had an unconquerable distaste to putting it in jeopardy in a thicket. Attended by Eben Dudley, Reuben Ring, and two other stout youths, all well, though lightly armed, Content then left the palisadoes, and took his way towards the forest. They entered the woods at the nearest point, always marching with the caution and vigilance that a sense of the true nature of the risk they ran

would inspire, and much practice only could properly direct.

The manner of the search was simple as it was likely to prove effectual. The scouts commenced a circuit around the clearing, extending their line as far as might be done without cutting off support, and each man lending his senses attentively to the signs of the trail, or of the lairs, of those dangerous enemies, who, they had reason to think, were outlying in their neighbourhood. But like the recent search in the buildings, the scouting was for a long time attended by no results. Many weary miles were passed slowly over, and more than half their task was ended, and no sign of being having life was met, except the very visible trail of their four guests, and the tracks of a single horse, along a path leading to the settlements, from the quarter by which the visiter of the preceding night had been known to approach. No comments were made by any

of the party, as each in succession struck and crossed this path, nearly at the same instant ; but a low call from Reuben Ring which soon after met their ears, caused them to assemble in a body at the spot, whence the summons had proceeded.

“Here are signs of one passing *from* the clearing,” said the quick-eyed woodsman, “and of one too that is not numbered among the family of Wish-Ton-Wish ; since his beast hath had a shodden hoof, a mark which belongeth to no animal of ours.”

“We will follow,” said Content, immediately striking in upon a straggling trail, that by many unequivocal signs had been left by some animal which had passed that way not many hours before. Their search, however, soon grew to a close. Ere they had gone any great distance, they came upon the half-demolished carcass of a dead horse. There was no mistaking the proprietor of this unfortunate

animal. Though some beast, or rather beasts, of prey, had fed plentifully on the body, which was still fresh, and had scarcely yet done bleeding, it was plain, by the remains of the torn equipments, as well as by the colour and size of the animal, that it was no other than the hack ridden by the unknown and mysterious guest ; who, after sharing in the worship and in the evening meal of the family of the Wish-Ton-Wish, had so strangely and so suddenly disappeared. The leathern sack, the weapons which had so singularly rivetted the gaze of old Mark, and indeed all but the carcass and a ruined saddle, were gone ; but what was left sufficiently served to identify the animal.

“ Here has been the tooth of wolf,” said Eben Dudley, stooping to examine into the nature of a ragged wound in the neck ; “ and here, too, has been cut off knife ; but whether

by the hand of a red-skin it exceedeth my art to say."

Each individual of the party now bent curiously over the wound; but the results of their inquiries went no further than to prove that it was undeniably the horse of the stranger that had forfeited its life. To the fate of its master, however, there was not the slightest clue. Abandoning the investigation, after a long and fruitless examination, they proceeded to finish the circuit of the clearing. Night had approached ere the fatiguing task was accomplished. As Ruth stood at the postern, waiting anxiously for their return, she saw, by the countenance of her husband, that while nothing had transpired to give any grounds of additional alarm, no satisfactory testimony had been obtained, to explain the nature of the painful doubts with which, as a tender and sensitive mother, she had been distressed throughout the day.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Is there not milking-time,
When you go to bed, or kiln-hole,
To whistle off these secrets ; but you must be
Tattling before all our guests ?”

Winter's Tale.

LONG experience hath shewn that the white man, when placed in situations to acquire such knowledge, readily becomes the master of most of that peculiar skill for which the North American Indian is so remarkable ; and which enables him, among other things, to detect the

signs of a forest trail, with a quickness and an accuracy of intelligence that amount nearly to an instinct. The fears of the family were therefore greatly quieted by the reports of the scouts, all of whom agreed in the opinion that no party of savages, that could be at all dangerous to a force like their own, was lying near the valley; and some of whom, the loudest of which number being stout Eben Dudley, boldly offered to answer for the security of those who depended on their vigilance with their own lives. These assurances had, beyond a doubt, a soothing influence on the apprehensions of Ruth and her handmaidens; but they somewhat failed of their effect with those unwelcome visiters who still continued to cumber Wish-Ton-Wish with their presence. Though they had evidently abandoned all ideas connected with the original object of their visit, they spoke not of departure. On the contrary, as night approach-

ed, their chief entered into council with old Mark Heathcote ; and made certain propositions for the security of his dwelling which the Puritan saw no reason to oppose.

A regular watch was in consequence set, and maintained till morning, at the palisadoes. The different members of the family retired to their usual places of rest, tranquil in appearance, if not in entire confidence of peace ; and the military messengers took post in the lower of the two fighting apartments of the citadel. With this simple, and, to the strangers, particularly satisfactory arrangement, the hours of darkness passed away in quiet ; morning returning to the secluded valley, as it had so often done before, with its loveliness unimpaired by violence or tumult.

In the same peaceful manner did the sun set successively three several times, and as often did it arise on the abode of the Heathcotes without further sign of danger, or motive of

alarm. With the passage of time, the agents of the Stuart gradually regained their confidence. Still, they never neglected to withdraw within the protection of the block-house with the retiring light, a post which the subordinate named Hallam more than once gravely observed they were, by their disciplined and military habits, singularly qualified to maintain. Though the Puritan secretly chafed under this protracted visit, habitual self-denial, and a manner so long subdued, enabled him to conceal his disgust. For the first two days after the alarm, the deportment of his guests was unexceptionable. All their faculties appeared to be engrossed with keen and anxious watchings of the forest, out of which, it would seem, they expected momentarily to see issue a band of ferocious and ruthless savages; but symptoms of returning levity began to be apparent, as confidence, and a feeling of secu-

city, increased with the quiet passage of the hours.

It was on the evening of the third day from that on which they had made their appearance in the settlement, that the man called Hallam was seen strolling, for the first time, through the postern so often named, and taking a direction which led towards the out-buildings. His air was less distrustful than it had been for many a weary hour, and his step proportionably confident and assuming. Instead of wearing, as he had been wont, a pair of heavy horseman's pistols at his girdle, he had even laid aside his broadsword, and appeared more in the guise of one who sought his personal ease, than in that cumbersome and martial attire which all of his party, until now, had deemed it prudent to maintain. He cast his glance cursorily over the fields of the Heathcotes, as they glowed under the soft light of a setting sun ;

nor did his eye even refuse to wander vacantly along the outline of that forest, which his imagination had so lately been peopling with beings of a fierce and ruthless nature.

The hour was one when rustic economy brings the labours of the day to a close. Among those who were more than usually active at that busy moment was a hand-maiden of Ruth, whose clear sweet voice was heard in one of the enclosures, occasionally rising on the notes of a spiritual song, and as often sinking to a nearly inaudible hum, as she extracted from a favourite animal liberal portions of its nightly tribute to the dairy of her mistress. To that enclosure the stranger, as it were by accident, suffered his sauntering footsteps to stroll, seemingly as much in admiration of the sleek herd, as of any other of its comely tenants.

“ From what thrush hast taken lessons, my pretty maid, that I mistook thy notes for one

of the sweetest songsters of thy woods?" he asked, trusting his person to the support of the pen, in an attitude of easy superiority. "One might fancy it a robin or a wren, trolling out his evening song, instead of human voice rising and falling in every-day psalmody."

"The birds of our forest rarely speak," returned the girl; "and the one among them which has most to say does it like those who are called gentlemen, when they set wit to work to please the ear of simple country maidens."

"And in what fashion may that be?"

"Mockery."

"Ah! I have heard of the creature's skill. It is said to be a compound of the harmony of all other forest songsters; and yet I see little resemblance to the honest language of a soldier in its manner of utterance."

“It speaketh without much meaning; and oftener to cheat the ear than in honest reason.”

“Thou forgettest that which I told thee in the morning, child. It would seem that they who named thee have no great cause to exult in their judgment of character, since Unbelief would better describe thy disposition than Faith.”

“It may be that they who named me, little knew how great must be credulity to give ear to all I have been required to credit.”

“Thou canst have no difficulty in admitting that thou art comely, since the eye itself will support thy belief; nor can one of so quick speech fail to know that her wit is sharper than common. Thus far, I admit, the name of Faith will not surely belie thy character.”

“If Eben Dudley hear thee use such vanity-stirring discourse,” returned the half pleased girl, “he might give thee less credit for wit than thou seemest willing to yield to others. I hear

his heavy foot among the cattle, and ere long we shall be sure to see a face that hath little more of lightness to boast."

"This Eben Dudley is a personage of no mean importance, I find !" muttered the other, continuing his walk, as the borderer named made his appearance at another entrance of the pen. The glances exchanged between them were far from friendly, though the woodsman permitted the stranger to pass without any oral expression of displeasure.

"The skittish heifer is getting gentle at last, Faith Ring," said the borderer, casting the butt of his musket on the ground with a violence that left a deep impression on the faded sward at his feet. "That brindled ox, old Logger, is not more willing to come into his yoke, than is the four-year-old to yield her milk."

"The creature has been getting kind, since you taught the manner to tame its humour," returned the dairy girl, in a voice that, spite of

every effort of maiden pride,-betrayed something of the flurry of her spirits, while she plied her light task with violent industry.

“Umph ! I hope some other of my teachings may be as well remembered ; but thou art quick at the trick of learning, Faith, as is plain by the ready manner in which thou hast so shortly got the habit of discourse with a man as nimble-tongued as yon riding reprobate from over sea.”

“ I hope that civil listening is no proof of unseemly discourse on the part of one who hath been trained in modesty of speech, Eben Dudley. Thou hast often said it was the bounden duty of her who was spoken to, to give ear, lest some might say she was of scornful mind, and her name for pride be better earned than that for good nature.”

“ I see that more of my lessons than I had hoped are still in thy keeping.” So thou lis-

tenest thus readily, Faith, because it is meet that a maiden should not be scornful !”

“ Thou sayest so. Whatever ill name I may deserve, thou hast no right to count scorn among my failings.”

“ If I do, may I——” Eben Dudley bit his lip, and checked an expression which would have given grievous offence to one whose habits of decency were as severe as those of his companion. “ Thou must have heard much that was profitable to-day, Faith Ring,” he added, “ considering that thy ear is so open, and that thy opportunities have been great.”

“ I know not what thou wouldst say by speaking of my opportunities,” returned the girl, bending still lower beneath the object of her industry, in order to conceal the glow which her own quick consciousness told her was burning on her cheek.

“ I would say that the tale must be long that

needeth four several trials of private speech to finish."

"Four!—as I hope to be believed for a girl of truth, in speech or deed, this is but the third time that the stranger hath spoken to me apart, since the sun hath risen."

"If I know the number of the fingers of my hand, it is the fourth!"

"Nay, how canst thou, Eben Dudley, who hast been afield since the crowing of the cock, know what hath passed about the dwellings? It is plain that envy, or some other evil passion, causeth thee to speak angrily."

"How is it that I know!—perhaps thou thinkest, Faith, thy brother Reuben only hath the gift of sight."

"The labour must have gone on with great profit to the Captain, whilst eyes have been roving over other matters! But perhaps they kept the strong of arm for the lookers-out, and have set them of feebler bodies to the toil."

“ I have not been so careless of thy life as to forget, at passing moments, to cast an eye abroad, pert one. Whatever thou mayst think of the need, there would be fine wailings in the butteries and dairies, did the Wompanoags get into the clearing, and were there none to give the alarm in season.”

“ Truly, Eben, thy terror of the child in the block must be grievous for one of thy manhood, else wouldst thou not watch the buildings so narrowly,” retorted Faith, laughing; for, with the dexterity of her sex, she began to feel the superiority she was gradually obtaining in the discourse. “ Thou dost not remember that we have valiant troopers from old England, to keep the younker from doing harm. But here cometh the brave soldier himself: it will be well to ask vigilance at his hands, or this night may bring us to the tomahawk in our sleep!”

“ Thou speakest of the weapon of the savages!” said the messenger, who had drawn

near again, with a visible willingness to share in an interview which, while he had watched its progress at a distance, appeared to be growing interesting. “ I trust all fear is over, from that quarter.”

“ As you say, for *this* quarter,” said Eben, adjusting his lips to a low whistle, and coolly looking up to examine the heavenly body to which he meant allusion. “ But the *next* quarter may bring us a pretty piece of Indian skirmishing.”

“ And what hath the moon in common with an incursion of the savages? Are there those among them, who study the secrets of the stars?”

“ They study deviltries and other wickedness, more than aught else. It is not easy for the mind of man to fancy horrors such as they design, when Providence has given them success in an inroad.”

“ But thou didst speak of the moon! In

what manner is the moon leagued with their bloody plots?"

"We have her now in the full, and there is little of the night when the eye of a watcher might not see a red-skin in the clearing; but a different tale may be heard when an hour or two of jet darkness shall again fall among these woods. There will be a change shortly; it behoveth us, therefore, to be on our guard."

"Thou thinkest then, truly, that there are outlyers waiting for the fitting moment," said the officer, with an interest so marked as to cause even the but half pacified Faith to glance an arch look at her companion, though he still had reason to distrust a wilful expression that lurked in the corner of her eyes, which threatened at each moment to contradict his relation of the sinister omens.

"There may be savages lying in the hills, at a day's journey in the forest; but they know

the aim of a white man's musket too well to be sleeping within reach of its range. It is the nature of an Indian to eat and sleep while he has time for quiet, and to fast and murder when the killing hour hath come."

"And what call you the distance to the nearest settlement on the Connecticut?" demanded the other, with an air so studiously indifferent as to furnish an easy clue to the inner workings of his mind.

"Some twenty hours would bring a nimble runner to the outer habitations, granting small time for food and rest. He that is wise, however, will take but little of the latter, until his head be safely housed within some such building as yon block, or until there shall stand between him and the forest at least a goodly row of oaken pickets.

"There is no path ridden by which travellers may avoid the forest during the darkness?"

“ I know of none. He who quits Wish-Ton-Wish for the towns below, must make his pillow of the earth, or be fain to ride as long as beast can carry.”

“ We have truly had experience of this necessity, journeying hither. Thou think’st, friend, the savages are in their resting time, and that they wait the coming quarter of the moon ?”

“ To my seeming we shall not have them sooner,” returned Eben Dudley, taking care to conceal all qualification of this opinion, if any such he entertained, by closely locking its purport in a mental reservation.

“ And what season is it usual to choose for getting into the saddle, when business calls any to the settlements below ?”

“ We never fail to take our departure about the time the sun touches the tall pine, which stands on yonder height of the mountain. Much experience hath told us it is the safest

hour; hand of time-piece is not more sure than yon tree."

"I like the night," said the other, looking about him with the air of one suddenly struck with the promising appearance of the weather. "The blackness no longer hangs about the forest, and it seems a fitting moment to push the matter on which we are sent nearer to its conclusion."

So saying, and probably believing that he had sufficiently concealed the motive of his decision, the uneasy dragoon walked with an air of soldierly coolness towards the dwellings, signing at the same time to one of his companions, who was regarding him from a distance, to approach.

"Now dost thou believe, witless Dudley, that the four fingers of thy clumsy hand have numbered the full amount of all that thou callest my listenings!" said Faith, when she thought no other ear but his to whom she

spoke could catch her words, and at the same time laughing merrily beneath her heifer, though still speaking with a vexation she could not entirely repress.

“Have I spoken aught but truth? It is not for such as I to give lessons in journeying, to one who follows the honest trade of a man-hunter. I have said that which all who dwell in these parts know to be reasonable.”

“Surely nought else. But truth is made so powerful in thy hands, that it needs be taken, like a bitter healing draught, with closed eyes and at many swallows. One who drinketh of it too freely, may well nigh be strangled. I marvel that he who is so vigilant in providing for the cares of others, should take so little heed of those he is set to guard.”

“I know not thy meaning, Faith. When was danger near the valley, and my musket wanting?”

“The good piece is truer to duty than its master. Thou mayest have lawful license to sleep on thy post, for we maidens know nothing of the pleasure of the Captain in these matters; but it would be as seemly, if not as soldierly, to place the arms at the postern and thyself in the chambers, when next thou hast need of watching and sleeping in the same hour.”

Dudley looked as confused as one of his mould and unbending temperament might well be, though he stubbornly refused to understand the allusion of his offended companion.

“Thou hast not discussed with the trooper from over sea in vain,” he said, “since thou speakest so wisely of watches and arms.”

“Truly he hath much schooled me in the matter.”

“Umph! and what may be the amount of his teaching?”

“That he who sleepeth at a postern should

neither talk too boldly of the enemy, nor expect maidens to put too much trust—”

“ In what, Faith ?”

“ Thou surely knowest I mean in his watchfulness. My life on it, had one happened to pass at a later hour than common near the night-post of that gentle-spoken soldier, he would not have been found, like a sentinel of this household in the second watch of the night that is gone, dreaming of the good things of the madam’s buttery.”

“ Didst truly come then, girl ?” said Eben, dropping his voice, and equally manifesting his satisfaction and his shame. “ But thou knowest, Faith, that the labour had fallen behind in behalf of the scouting party, and that the toil of yesterday exceeded that of our usual burthens. Nevertheless I keep the postern again to-night, from eight to twelve, and—”

“ Will make a goodly rest of it, I doubt

not. No, he who hath been so vigilant throughout the day, must needs tire of the task as night draws on. Fare thee well, wakeful Dudley ; if thine eyes should open on the morrow, be thankful that the maidens have not stitched thy garments to the palisadoes !”

Notwithstanding the efforts of the young man to detain her, the light-footed girl eluded his grasp, and bearing her burden towards the dairy, she tripped along the path with a half-averted face, in which triumph and repentance were already struggling for the possession.

In the mean time, the leader of the messengers and his military subordinate had a long and interesting conference. When it was ended, the former took his way to the apartment in which Mark Heathcote was wont to pass those portions of his time, that were not occupied in his secret strivings for the

faith, or in exercise without, while superintending the labourers in the fields. With some little circumlocution, which was intended to mask his real motives, the agent of the King announced his intention to take his final departure that very night.

“ I felt it a duty as one who has gained experience in arms by some practice in the wars of Europe,” he said, “ to tarry in thy dwelling while danger threatened from the lurking savage. It would ill become soldiers to speak of their intentions; but had the alarm in truth sounded, thou wilt give faith when I say that the block-house would not have been lightly yielded! I shall make report to them that sent me, that in Captain Mark Heathcote Charles hath a loyal subject, and the Constitution a firm supporter. The rumours of a seemingly mistaken description, which have led us hither, shall be contradicted, and doubtless it will be found that some accident hath given

rise to the deception. Should there be occasion to dwell on the particulars of the late alarm, I trust the readiness of my followers to do good service to one of the King's subjects, will not be overlooked."

"It is the striving of a humble spirit to speak nought evil of its fellows, and to conceal no good," returned the reserved Puritan. "If thou hast found thy abode in my dwelling to thy liking, thou art welcome; and if duty or pleasure calleth thee to quit it, peace go with thee. It will be useful to unite with us in asking that thy passage through the wilderness may be unharmed; that He who watcheth over the meanest of his creatures should take thee in his especial keeping; and that the savage heathen—"

"Dost think the savage out of his villages?" demanded the messenger, with an indecorous rapidity, that cut short the enumeration of the particular blessings and dangers that his

host thought it meet to include in the leave-taking prayer.

“Thou surely hast not tarried with us to aid in the defence, and yet feel it doubtful that thy services might be useful?” observed Mark Heathcote, drily.

“I would the Prince of Darkness had thee and all the other diabolicals of these woods in his own good gripe!” muttered the messenger between his teeth; and then, as if guided by a spirit that could not long be quelled, he assumed something more of his unbridled and natural air, boldly declining to join in the prayer, on the plea of haste, and the necessity of his looking in person to the movements of his followers. “But this need not prevent thee, worthy Captain, from pouring out an asking in our behalf, while we are in the saddle,” he concluded; “for ourselves, there remaineth much of thy previously bestowed pious aliment to be digested, though

we doubt not that should thy voice be raised in our behalf, while journeying along the first few leagues of the forest, the tread of the hacks would not be heavier, and, it is certainty, that we ourselves should be none the worse for the favour."

Then casting a glance of ill-concealed levity at one of his followers, who had come to say that their steeds awaited, he made the parting salutation with an air, in which the respect that one like the Puritan could scarce fail to excite, struggled with his habitual contempt for things of a serious character.

The family of Mark Heathcote, the lowest dependant included, saw these strangers depart with great inward satisfaction. Even the maidens, in whom nature, in moments weaker than common, had awakened some of the lighter vanities, were gladly rid of gallants, who could not soothe their ears with the unction of flattery, without frequently giving great

offence to their severe principles by light and irreverent allusions to things on which they themselves were accustomed to think with fitting awe. Eben Dudley could scarcely conceal the chuckle with which he saw the party bury themselves in the forest, though neither he, nor any of the more instructed in such matters, believed they incurred serious risk from their sudden enterprise.

The opinions of the scouts proved to be founded on accurate premises. That and many a subsequent night passed without alarm. The season continued to advance, and the labourers pursued their toil to its close, without another appeal to their courage, or any additional reasons for vigilance. Whittal Ring followed his colts with impunity, among the recesses of the neighbouring forests, and the herds of the family went and came, as long as the weather would permit them to range the woods, in regularity and peace. The pe-

riod of the alarm, and the visit of the agents of the crown, came to be food for tradition: and during the succeeding winter, the former often furnished motive of merriment around the blazing fires that were so necessary to the country and the season.

Still there existed in the family a living memorial of the unusual incidents of that night. The captive remained, long after the events which had placed him in the power of the Heathcotes were beginning to be forgotten.

A desire to quicken the seeds of spiritual regeneration which, however dormant they might be, old Mark Heathcote believed to exist in the whole family of man, and consequently in the young heathen as well as in others, had become a sort of ruling passion in the Puritan. The fashions and mode of thinking of the times had a strong leaning towards superstition: and it was far from diffi-

cult for a man of his ascetic habits and exaggerated doctrines, to believe that a special interposition had cast the boy into his hands, for some hidden but mighty purpose, that time in the good season would not fail to reveal.

Notwithstanding the strong colouring of fanaticism which tinged the characters of the religionists of those days, they were rarely wanting in worldly discretion. The agents they saw fit to employ, in order to aid the more hidden purposes of Providence, were in common useful and rational. Thus, while Mark never forgot to summon the lad from his prison at the hour of prayer, or to include an especial asking, in behalf of the ignorant heathen in general, and of this chosen youth in particular, he hesitated to believe that a manifest miracle would be exerted in his favour. That no blame might attach to the portion of duty that was confided to human means, he had recourse to the discreet agency of kindness

and unremitted care. But all attempts to lure the lad into the habits of a civilized man were completely unsuccessful. As the severity of the weather increased, the compassionate and thoughtful Ruth endeavoured to induce him to adopt the garments that were found so necessary to the comfort of men, who were greatly his superiors in hardihood and in strength. Clothes, decorated in a fashion suited to the taste of an Indian, were considerably provided, and entreaties and threats were both freely used, with a view to make the captive wear them. On one occasion he was even forcibly clad by Eben Dudley, and being brought, in the unwonted guise, into the presence of old Mark, the latter offered up an especial petition that the youth might be made to feel the merits of this concession to the principles of a chastened and instructed man. But within an hour, the stout woodsman, who had been made on the occasion so active

an instrument of civilization, announced to the admiring Faith that the experiment was unsuccessful; or, as Eben somewhat irreverently described the extraordinary effort of the Puritan, "the heathen hath already resumed his skin leggings and painted waist-cloth, notwithstanding the Captain has strove to pin better garments on his back, by virtue of a prayer that might have clothed the nakedness of a whole tribe." In short the result proved, in the case of this lad, as similar experiments have since proved in so many other instances, the difficulty of tempting one trained in the freedom and ease of a savage, to consent to admit of the restraints of a state of being that is commonly thought to be so much superior. In every instance in which the youthful captive had liberty of choice, he disdainfully rejected the customs of the whites, adhering, with a singular and almost heroic pertinacity, to the usages of his people and his condition.

The boy was not kept in his bondage without extraordinary care. Once, when trusted in the fields, he had openly attempted to escape, nor was the possession of his person recovered without putting the speed of Eben Dudley and Reuben Ring to a more severe trial, as was confessed by the athletic young borderers themselves, than any they had hitherto undergone. From that moment he was never permitted to pass the palisadoes. When duty called the labourers afield the captive was invariably secured in his prison, where, as some compensation for his confinement, he was supposed to enjoy the benefit of long and familiar communication with Mark Heathcote, who had the habit of passing many hours of each day, and, not unfrequently, long portions of the night too, within the retirement of the block-house. During the time only when the gates were closed, or when some one of strength and activity sufficient to control

his movements was present, was the lad permitted to stroll, at will, among the buildings of the border fortress. This liberty he never failed to exercise, and often in a manner that overcame the affectionate Ruth with a painful excess of sensibility.

Instead of joining in the play of the other children, the young captive would stand aloof, and regard their sports with a vacant eye: or, drawing near to the palisadoes, he often passed hours in gazing wistfully at those endless forests in which he first drew breath, and which probably contained all that was most prized in the estimation of his simple judgment. Ruth, touched to the heart by this silent but expressive exhibition of suffering, endeavoured in vain to win his confidence, with a view of enticing him into employments that might serve to relieve his care. The resolute but still quiet boy would not be lured into a forgetfulness of his origin. He appeared to comprehend the kind

intentions of his gentle mistress, and frequently he even suffered himself to be led by the mother into the centre of her own joyous and merry offspring, but it was only to look upon their amusements with his former cold air, and to return, at the first opportunity, to his beloved site at the pickets. Still there were singular and even mysterious evidences of a growing consciousness of the nature of the discourse of which he was occasionally an auditor, that would have betrayed greater familiarity with the language and opinions of the inhabitants of the valley, than his known origin and his absolute withdrawal from communication could give reason to expect. This important and inexplicable fact was proved by the frequent and meaning glances of his dark eye, when aught was uttered in his hearing that affected, ever so remotely, his own condition: and, once or twice, by the haughty gleamings of ferocity that escaped him, when Eben Dudley was heard to vaunt the

prowess of the white men in their encounters with the original owners of the country. The Puritan did not fail to note these symptoms of a budding intelligence, as the pledges of a fruit that would more than reward his pious toil, and they served to furnish a great relief to certain occasional repugnance, which all his zeal could not entirely subdue, at being the instrument of causing so much suffering to one who, after all, had inflicted no positive wrong on himself.

At the period of which we are writing, the climate of these States differed materially from that which is now known to their inhabitants. A winter in the Province of Connecticut was attended by many successive falls of snow, until the earth was entirely covered with firmly compressed masses of the frozen element. Occasional thaws and passing storms of rain, that were driven away by a return of the clear and cutting cold of the north-western gales, were wont at times to lay a covering on the ground

that was congealed to the consistency of ice, until men, and not unfrequently beasts, and sometimes sleighs, were seen moving on its surface, as on the bed of a frozen lake. During the extremity of a season like this, the hardy borderers, who could not toil in their customary pursuits, were wont to range the forest in quest of game, which, driven for food to known resorting places in the woods, then fell most easily a prey to the intelligence and skill of such men as Eben Dudley and Reuben Ring.

The youths never left the dwellings on these hunts without exciting the most touching interest in their movements, on the part of the Indian boy. On all such occasions he would linger at the loops of his prison throughout the day, listening intently to the reports of the distant muskets, as they resounded in the forest, and the only time, during a captivity of so many months, that he was ever seen to smile, was when he examined the grim look and muscular

claws of a dead panther, that had fallen beneath the aim of Dudley, in one of these excursions to the mountains. The compassion of all the borderers was powerfully awakened in behalf of the patient and dignified young sufferer, and gladly would they have given their captive the pleasure of joining in the chase, had not the task been one that was far from easy of accomplishment. The former of the woodsmen just mentioned had even volunteered to lead him, like a hound in a leash ; but this was a species of degradation against which it was certain that a young Indian, ambitious of the character and jealous of the dignity of a warrior, would have openly rebelled.

The quick interest of the observant Ruth had, as it has been seen, early detected a growing intelligence in the boy. The means by which one, who never mingled in the employments, and who rarely seemed to listen to the dialogues of the family, could come to comprehend the mean-

ing of a language that is found sufficiently difficult for a scholar, were, however, as much of a mystery to her, as to all around her. Still, by the aid of that instinctive tact, which so often enlightens the mind of woman, was she certain of the fact. Profiting by this knowledge, she assumed the task of endeavouring to obtain an honorary pledge from her protégé, that, if permitted to join the hunters, he would return to the valley at the end of the day. But though the language of the woman was gentle as her own kind nature, and her entreaties that he would give some evidence of having comprehended her meaning were zealous and oft repeated, not the smallest symptom of intelligence, on this occasion, could be extracted from her pupil. Disappointed, and not without sorrow, Ruth had abandoned the compassionate design in despair, when, on a sudden, the old Puritan, who had been a silent spectator of her fruitless efforts, announced his faith in the integrity of

the lad, and his intention to permit him to make one of the very next party that should leave the habitations.

The cause of this sudden change in the hitherto stern watchfulness of Mark Heathcote was, like so many other of his impulses, a secret in his own bosom. It has just been said, that during the time Ruth was engaged in her kind and fruitless experiment to extract some evidence of intelligence from the boy, the Puritan was a close and interested observer of her efforts. He appeared to sympathize in her disappointment ; but the weal of those unconverted tribes who were to be led from the darkness of their ways by the instrumentality of this youth, was far too important to admit the thought of rashly losing the vantage ground he had gained, in the gradually expanding intellect of the boy, by running the hazard of an escape. To all appearance, the intention of permitting him to quit the defences had therefore been entirely aban-

done, when old Mark so suddenly announced a change of resolution. The conjectures on the causes of this unlooked for determination were exceedingly various. Some believed that the Puritan had been favoured with a mysterious intimation of the pleasure of Providence, in the matter: and others thought that, beginning to despair of success in his undertaking, he was willing to seek for a more visible manifestation of its purposes, by hazarding the experiment of trusting the boy to the direction of his own impulses. All appeared to be of opinion, that if the lad returned, the circumstance might be set down to the intervention of a miracle. Still, with his resolution once taken, the purpose of Mark Heathcote remained unchanged. He announced this unexpected intention after one of his long and solitary visits to the block-house, where it is possible he had held a powerful spiritual strife on the occasion: and, as the weather was exceedingly favourable for such an object,

he commanded his dependants to prepare to make the sortie on the following morning.

A sudden and an uncontrollable gleam of delight flashed on the dark features of the captive, when Ruth was about to place in his hands the bow of her own son, and, by signs and words, she gave him to understand that he was to be permitted to use it in the free air of the forest. But the exhibition of pleasure disappeared as quickly as it had been betrayed. When the lad received the weapons, it was rather with the manner of a hunter accustomed to their use, than of one to whose hands they had so long been strangers. As he left the gates of Wish-Ton-Wish, the handmaidens of Ruth clustered about him, in wondering interest, for it was strange to see a youth so long guarded with jealous care, again free and unwatched. Notwithstanding their ordinary dependance on the secret lights and great wisdom of the Puritan, there was a very

general impression that the lad, around whose presence there was so much that was mysterious and of interest to their own security, was now to be gazed upon for the last time. The boy himself was unmoved to the last. Still he paused, with his foot on the threshold of the dwelling, and appeared to regard Ruth and her young offspring with momentary concern. Then, assuming the calm air of an Indian warrior, he suffered his eye to grow cold and vacant, following with a nimble step the hunters, who were already passing without the palisadoes.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Well, I am your theme ; you have the start of me ; I am dejected ; I am not able to answer the Welsh flannel ; ignorance itself is a plummet over me : use me as you will.”

Merry Wives of Windsor.

POETS, aided by the general longing of human nature, have given a reputation to the Spring that it rarely merits. Though this imaginative class of writers have said so much of its balmy airs and odoriferous gales, we find it nearly everywhere the most reluctant, churlish, and fickle of the four seasons. It is the

youth of the year, and, like that probationary period of life, most fitted to afford the promise of better things. There is a constant struggle between reality and hope, throughout the whole of this slow-moving and treacherous period, which has an unavoidable tendency to deceive. All that is said of its grateful productions is fallacious, for the earth is as little likely to yield a generous tribute without the quickening influence of the summer heats, as man is wont to bring forth commendable fruits, without the agency of a higher moral power than any he possesses in virtue of his innate propensities. On the other hand, the fall of the year possesses a sweetness, a repose, and a consistency, which may be justly likened to the decline of a well spent life. It is, in all countries, and in every climate, the period when physical and moral causes unite to furnish the richest sources of enjoyment. If the Spring is the time of hope, Autumn is the season of fruition. There is

just enough of change to give zest to the current of existence, while there is too little of vicissitude to be pregnant of disappointment. Succeeding to the nakedness of Winter, the Spring is grateful by comparison, while the glories of Autumn are enjoyed, after the genial powers of Summer have been lavishly expended.

In obedience to this great law of the earth, let poets sing and fancy as they may, the Spring and Autumn of America partake largely of the universally distinctive characters of the rival seasons. What Nature has done on this continent has not been done niggardly: and while we may boast of a decline of the year, that certainly rivals, and, with few exceptions, eclipses the glories of most of the climates of the old world, the opening months rarely fail of equalizing the gifts of Providence, by a very decided exhibition of all the disagreeable qualities for which they are remarkable.

More than half a year had elapsed, between the time when the Indian boy had been found lurking in the valley of the Heathcotes and that day when he was first permitted to go into the forest, fettered by no other restraint than the moral tie which the owner of the valley either knew, or fancied, would not fail to cause him to return to a bondage he had found so irksome. It was April; but it was April as the month was known a century ago in Connecticut, and as it is even now so often found to disappoint all expectations of that capricious season of the year. The weather had returned suddenly and violently to the rigour of winter. A thaw had been succeeded by a storm of snow and sleet, and the interlude of the spring-time of blossoms had terminated with a biting gale from the north-west, which had apparently placed a permanent seal on the lingering presence of a second February.

On the morning that Content led his follow-

ers into the forest, they issued from the postern clad in coats of skin. Their lower limbs were protected by the coarse leggings which they had worn in so many previous hunts, during the past winter, if that might be called past which had returned, weakened but little of its keenness, and bearing all the outward marks of January. When last seen, Eben Dudley, the heaviest of the band, was moving firmly on the crust of the snow, with a step as sure as if he had trodden on the frozen earth itself. More than one of the maidens declared, that though they had endeavoured to trace the footsteps of the hunters from the palisadoes, it would have exceeded even the sagacity of an Indian eye to follow their trail along the icy path they travelled.

Hour after hour passed, without bringing tidings from the chase. The reports of fire-arms had indeed been occasionally heard, ringing among the arches of the woods, and broken

echoes were, for some hours, rolling from one recess of the hills to another. But even these signs of the presence of the hunters gradually receded with the advance of the day: and long ere the sun had gained the meridian, and its warmth—at that advanced season, not without power—was shed into the valley, the whole range of the adjoining forest lay in its ordinary dull and solemn silence.

The incident of the hunt, apart from the absence of the Indian boy, was one of too common occurrence to give birth to any particular motives of excitement. Ruth quietly busied herself among her women: and when the recollection of those who were scouring the neighbouring forest came at all to her mind, it was coupled with the care with which she was providing to administer to their comforts, after the fatigue of a day of extraordinary personal efforts. This was a duty never lightly performed. Her situation was one eminently fitted

to foster the best affections of woman, since it admitted of few temptations to yield to other than the most natural feelings ; she was, in consequence, known on all occasions to exercise them with the devotedness of her sex.

“Thy father and his companions will look on our care with pleasure,” said the thoughtful matron to her youthful image, as she directed a more than usual provision of her larder to be got in readiness for the hunters ; “home is ever sweetest after toil and exposure.”

“I doubt if Mark be not ready to faint with so weary a march,” said the child already introduced by the name of Martha ; “he is young to go into the woods, with scouts tall as great Dudley.”

“And the heathen,” added the little Ruth ; “he is young too as Mark, though more used to the toil. It may be, mother, that he will never come to us more !”

“That would grieve our venerable parent ;

for thou knowest, Ruth, that he hath hopes of working on the mind of the boy, until his savage nature shall yield to the secret power. But the sun is falling behind the hill, and the evening is coming in cool as winter; go to the postern, and look out upon the fields. I would know if there be any signs of thy father and his party."

Though Ruth gave this mandate to her daughter, she did not the less neglect to exercise her own faculties in the same grateful office. While the children went, as they were ordered, to the outer gate, the matron herself ascended to the lower apartment of the block, and, from its different loops, she took a long and anxious survey of the limited prospect. The shadows of the trees, that lined the western side of the view, were already thrown far across the broad sheet of frozen snow, and the sudden chill, which succeeded the disappearance of the sun, announced the rapid approach of a night that

promised to support the severe character of the past day. A freezing wind, which had brought with it the cold airs of the great lakes, and which had even triumphed over the more natural influence of an April sun, had however fallen, leaving a temperature not unlike that which dwells in the milder seasons of the year among the glaciers of the Upper Alps.

Ruth was too long accustomed to such forest scenes, and to such a "lingering of winter in the lap of May," to feel, on their account, any additional uneasiness. But the hour had now arrived when she had reason to look for the return of the hunters. With the expectation of seeing their forms issuing from the forest, came the anxiety which is an unavoidable attendant of disappointment. The shadows continued to deepen in the valley, until the gloom thickened to the darkness of night, without bringing any tidings from those without.

When a delay, which was unusual in the

members of a family circumstanced like that of the Wish-Ton-Wish, came to be coupled with various little observations that had been made during the day, it was thought that reasons for alarm were beginning, at each instant, to grow more plausible. Reports of fire-arms had been heard, at an early hour, from opposite points in the hills, and in a manner too distinct to be mistaken for echoes—a certain proof that the different members of the hunt had separated in the forest. Under such circumstances, it was not difficult for the imagination of a wife and a mother, of a sister, or of her who secretly confessed a still more tender interest in some one of the hunters, to conjure to the imagination the numberless dangers to which those who were engaged in these expeditions were known to be exposed.

“ I doubt that the chase hath drawn them further from the valley than is fitting for the hour and the season,” observed Ruth to her

maidens, who had gathered in a group about her, at a point that overlooked as much of the cleared land around the buildings as the darkness would allow ; “ the gravest man becomes thoughtless as the unreflecting child when led by the eagerness of the pursuit. It is the duty of older heads to think for those that want experience. But into what indiscreet complaints are my fears leading ! It may be that my husband is even now striving to collect his party, in order to return. Hast any heard his conch sounding the recall ? ”

“ The woods are still as the day the first echo of the axe was heard among the trees,” returned Faith. “ I did hear that which sounded like a strain of brawling Dudley’s songs, but it proved to be no more than the lowing of one of his own oxen. Perchance the animal misseth some of its master’s care.”

“ Whittal Ring hath looked to the beasts, and it may not be that he hath neglected to

feed, among others, the creatures of Dudley. Thy mind is given to levity, Faith, in the matter of this young man. It is not seemly that one of thy years and sex should manifest so great displeasure at the name of a youth, who is of an honest nature, and of honest habits, too, though he may appear ungainly to the eye, and have so little favour with one of thy disposition."

"I did not fashion the man," said Faith, biting her lip and tossing her head; "nor is it aught to me whether he be gainly or not. As to my favour, when he asks it, the man shall not wait long to know the answer. But is not yon figure the fellow himself, Madame Heathcote—here, coming in from the eastern hill, along the orchard path? The form I mean is just here; you may see it at this moment turning by the bend in the brook."

"There is one, of a certainty, and it should be one of our hunting party, too; and yet he

doth not seem to be of a size, or of a gait like that of Eben Dudley. Thou shouldst have a knowledge of thy kindred, girl ; to me it seemeth thy brother."

"Truly, it may be Reuben Ring ; still it hath much of the swagger of the other, though their stature be nearly equal. The manner of carrying the musket is much the same with all the borderers, too. One cannot easily tell the form of man from a stump by this light—and, yet do I think it will prove to be the loitering Dudley."

"Loiterer or not, he is the first to return from this long and weary chase," said Ruth, breathing heavily, like one who regretted that the truth were so. "Go thou to the postern, and admit him, girl. I ordered bolts to be drawn, for I like not to leave a fortress defended by a female garrison, at this hour, with open gates. I will hie to the dwelling, and see to the comforts of those who are a-hungred, since

it will not be long ere we shall have more of them at hand."

Faith complied, with affected indifference and sufficient delay. By the time she had reached the place of admission, a form was seen ascending the acclivity, and taking the direction which led to the same spot. In the next minute, a rude effort to enter announced an arrival without.

"Gently, Master Dudley," said the wilful girl, who held the bolt with one hand, though she maliciously delayed to remove it. "We know thou art powerful of arm, and yet the palisadoes will scarcely fall at thy touch. Here are no Samsons to pull down the pillars on our heads. Perhaps we may not be disposed to give entrance to them who stay abroad out of all season."

"Open the postern, girl," said Eben Dudley; "after which, if thou hast aught to say, we shall be better convenienced for discourse."

“It may be that thy conversation is most agreeable when heard from without. Render an account of thy backslidings throughout this day, penitent Dudley, that I may take pity on thy weariness. But lest hunger should have overcome thy memory, I may serve to help thee to the particulars. The first of thy offences was to consume more than thy portion of the cold meats; the second was to suffer Reuben Ring to kill the deer, and for thee to claim it; and a third was the trick thou hast of listening so much to thine own voice, that even the beasts fled thee, from dislike of thy noise.”

“Thou triflest unseasonably, Faith; I would speak with the Captain without delay.”

“It may be that he is better employed than to desire such company. Thou art not the only strange animal by many who hath roared at the gate of Wish-Ton-Wish.”

“Have any come within the day, Faith?”

demanded the borderer, with the interest such an event would be likely to create in the mind of one who habitually lived in so great retirement.

“What sayest thou to a second visit from the gentle spoken stranger,—he who favoured us with so much gay discourse, the by-gone fall of the year? That would be a guest fit to receive! I warrant me his knock would not be heard a second time.”

“The gallant had better beware the moon!” exclaimed Dudley, striking the but of his musket against the ice with so much force as to cause his companion to start in alarm. “What fool’s errand hath again brought him to prick his nag so deep into the forest?”

“Nay, thy wit is ever like the unbroken colt, a head-strong run-away. I said not in full meaning, that the man had come; I only invited thee to give an opinion in the event that he should arrive unexpectedly, though I am far

from certain that any here ever expect to see his face again."

"This is foolish prating," returned the youth, provoked at the exhibition of jealousy into which he had been incautiously betrayed. "I tell thee to withdraw the bolt, for I have great need to speak with the Captain, or with his son."

"Thou mayest open thy mind to the first, if he will listen to what thou hast to say," returned the girl, removing the impediment to his entrance; "but thou wilt sooner get the ear of the other by remaining at the gate, since he has not yet come in from the forest."

Dudley recoiled a pace, and repeated her words, in the tone of one who admitted a feeling of alarm to mingle with his surprise.

"Not in from the forest!" he said; "surely there are none abroad, now that I am home!"

“Why dost say it? I have put my jibes upon thee more in payment of ancient transgressions than for any present offence. So far from being last, thou art the first of the hunters we have yet seen. Go in to the Madam without delay, and tell her of the danger, if any there be, that we take speedy measures for our safety.”

“That would do little good, truly,” muttered the borderer, like one musing. “Stay thou here, and watch the postern, Faith; I will back to the woods; for a timely word, or a signal blown from my conch, might quicken their footsteps.”

“What madness hath beset thee, Dudley! Thou wouldst not go into the forest again, at this hour, and alone, if there be reason for fear. Come farther within the gate, man, that I may draw the bolt; the Madam will wonder that we tarry here so long.

“Ha!—I hear feet moving in the meadow;

I know it by the creaking of the snow ; the others are not lagging."

Notwithstanding the apparent certainty of the young man, instead of going forth to meet his friends, he withdrew a step, and with his own hand drew the bolt that Faith had just desired might be fastened ; taking care, at the same time, to let fall a swinging bar of wood, which gave additional security to the fastenings of the postern. His apprehensions, if any such had induced this caution, were, however, unnecessary ; for ere he had time to make, or even to reflect on, any further movement, admission was demanded, in the well-known voice of the son of him who owned the valley. The bustle of the arrival—for with Content entered a group of companions, loaded with venison—put an end to the dialogue. Faith seized the opportunity to glide away in the obscurity, in order to announce to her mistress that the hunters had re-

turned—an office which she performed without entering at all into the particulars of her own interview with Eben Dudley.

It is needless to dwell on the satisfaction with which Ruth received her husband and son, after the uneasiness she had just suffered. Though the severe manners of the province admitted of no violent exhibition of passing emotions, secret joy was reigning in the mild eyes, and glowing about the flushed cheeks, of the discreet matron, while she personally officiated in the offices of the evening meal.

The party had returned teeming with no extraordinary incidents; nor did they appear to be disturbed with any of that seriousness of air which had so unequivocally characterised the deportment of him who had preceded them. On the contrary, each had his quiet tale to relate,—now, perhaps, at the expense of a luckless companion, and sometimes in order that no part of his own individual skill

as a hunter should be unknown. The delay was accounted for, as similar delays are commonly explained, by distance, and the temptations of an unusually successful chase. As the appetites of those who had passed the day in the exciting toil were keen, and the viands tempting, the first half hour passed quickly, as all such half hours are wont to pass, in garrulous recitals of personal exploits, and of the hair-breadth escapes of deer, which, had fortune not been fickle, should have now been present, as trophies of the skill of the hand by which they fell. It was only after personal vanity was sufficiently appeased, and when the hunger even of a border man could achieve no more, that the hunters began to look about them with a diminished excitement, and to discuss the events of the day with a fitting calmness, and with a discretion more suited to their ordinary self-command

“ We lost the sound of thy conch, wan-

dering Dudley, as we fell into the deep hollow of the mountain," said Content, in a pause of the discourse; "since which time neither eye nor ear of any has had trace of thy movements, until we met thee at the postern, stationed like a looker-out on his watch."

The individual addressed had mingled in none of the gaiety of the hour. While others fed freely, or joined in the quiet joke, which could escape the lips of even men chastened as his companions, Eben Dudley had tasted sparingly of the viands. Nor had the muscles of his hard countenance once relaxed in a smile. A gravity and silence so extraordinary, in one so little accustomed to exhibit either quality, did not fail to attract attention. It was universally ascribed to the circumstance that he had returned empty-handed from the hunt; and now that one having authority had seen fit to give such a direction to the discourse,

the imaginary delinquent was not permitted to escape unscathed.

“The butcher had little to do with this day’s killing,” said one of the young men; “as a punishment for his absence from the slaughter, he should be made to go on the hill, and bring in the two bucks he will find hanging from a maple sapling near to the drinking spring. Our meat should pass through his hands in some fashion or other, else will it lack savour.”

“Ever since the death of the straggling wether, the trade of Eben hath been at a stand,” added another; “the down-hearted youth seems like one ready to give up his calling to the first stranger that shall ask it.”

“Creatures which run at large prove better mutton than the stalled wether,” continued a third; “and thereby custom was getting low before this hunt. Beyond a doubt, he has a

full supply for all who shall be likely to seek venison in his stall."

Ruth observed that the countenance of her husband grew grave, at these allusions to an event he had always seemed to wish forgotten; and she interposed, with a view to lead the minds of those who listened back to matter more fitting to be discussed.

"How is this!" she exclaimed in haste; "hath the stout Dudley lost any of his craft? I have never counted with greater certainty on the riches of the table, than when he hath been sent among the hills for the fat deer, or the tender turkey. It would much grieve me to learn that he beginneth to lack the hunter's skill."

"The man is getting melancholy with over feeding," muttered the wilful tones of one busied among the vessels, in a distant part of the room. "He taketh his exercise alone, in order that

none need discover the failing. I think he be much disposed to go over sea, in order to become a trooper."

Until now, the subject of these mirthful attacks had listened like one too confident of his established reputation to feel concern; but at the sound of the last speaker's voice, he grasped the bushy covering of one entire cheek in his hand, and, turning a reproachful and irritated glance at the already half-repentant eye of Faith Ring, all his natural spirit returned.

"It may be that my skill hath left me," he said, "and that I love to be alone, rather than to be troubled with the company of some that might readily be named, no reference being had to such gallants as ride up and down the colony, putting evil opinions into the thoughts of honest men's daughters; but why is Eben Dudley to bear all the small shot of your humours, when there is another who, it might

seem, hath strayed even further from your trail than he?"

Eye sought eye, and each youth, by hasty glances, endeavoured to read the countenances of all the rest in company, in order to learn who the absentee might be. The young borderers shook their heads, as the features of every well-known face were recognised, and a general exclamation of denial was about to break from their lips, when Ruth exclaimed—

“ Truly the Indian is wanting !”

So constant was the apprehension of danger from the savages, in the breasts of those who dwelt on that exposed frontier, that every man arose at the words, by a sudden and common impulse, and each individual gazed about him, in a surprise that was a little akin to dismay.

“ The boy was with us when we quitted the forest,” said Content, after a moment of death-like stillness. “ I spoke to him in commenda-

tion of his activity, and of the knowledge he had shewn in beating up the secret places of the deer, though there is little reason to think my words were understood."

"And were it not sinful to take such solemn evidence in behalf of so light a matter, I could be qualified on the book itself, that he was at my elbow as we entered the orchard," added Reuben Ring, a man renowned in that little community for the accuracy of his vision.

"And I will make oath, or declaration of any sort, lawful or conscientious, that he came not within the postern, when it was opened by my own hand," returned Eben Dudley. "I told off the number of the party, as you passed, and right sure am I that no red-skin entered."

"Canst thou tell us aught of the lad?" demanded Ruth, quick to take the alarm on a subject that had so long exercised her care and given food to her imagination.

“Nothing. With me he hath not been since the turn of the day. I have not seen the face of living man from that moment, unless, in truth, one of mysterious character, whom I met in the forest, may be so called.”

The manner in which the woodsman spoke was too serious and too natural, not to give birth in his auditors to some of his own gravity. Perhaps the appearance of the Puritan, at that moment, aided in quieting the levity that had been uppermost in the minds of the young men; for it is certain, that when he entered, a deeper and a general curiosity came over the countenances of all present. Content waited a moment in respectful silence, till his father had moved slowly through the circle, and then he prepared himself to look further into an affair, that began to assume the appearance of matter worthy of investigation.

CHAPTER IX.

Ber. Last night of all,
When yon same star, that's westward from the pole,
Had made its course to illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus, and myself,
The bell then beating one—

Mar. Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again !

Hamlet.

It is our duty, as faithful historians of the events recorded in this homely legend, to conceal no circumstance which may throw the necessary degree of light on its incidents, nor any opinion that may serve for the better instruction of the reader in the characters of

its actors. In order that this obligation may be discharged with sufficient clearness and precision, it has now become necessary to make a short digression from the immediate action of the tale.

Enough has been already shewn, to prove that the Heathcotes lived at a time, and in a country, where very quaint and peculiar religious dogmas had the ascendancy. At a period when visible manifestations of the goodness of Providence, not only in spiritual, but in temporal gifts, were confidently expected and openly proclaimed, it is not at all surprising that more evil agencies should be thought to exercise their power in a manner that is somewhat opposed to the experience of our own age. As we have no wish, however, to make these pages the medium of a theological or metaphysical controversy, we shall deal tenderly with certain important events, that most of the writers, who were contemporary with the facts,

assert took place in the colonies of New England, at and about the period of which we are now writing. It is sufficiently known that the art of witchcraft, and one even still more diabolical and direct in its origin, were then believed to flourish, in that quarter of the world, to a degree that was probably in a very just proportion to the neglect with which most of the other arts of life were treated.

There is so much grave and respectable authority, to prove the existence of these evil influences, that it requires a pen hardier than any we wield, to attack them, without a suitable motive. “Flashy people,” says the learned and pious Cotton Mather, Doctor of Divinity, and Fellow of the Royal Society, “may burlesque these things; but when hundreds of the most sober people, in a country where they have as much mother wit, certainly, as the rest of mankind, *know them to be true*, nothing but the absurd and froward spirit of Sadducism

can question them." Against this grave and credited authority we pretend to raise no question of scepticism. We submit to the testimony of such a writer as conclusive, though, as credulity is sometimes found to be bounded by geographical limits, and to possess something of a national character, it may be prudent to refer certain readers, who dwell in the other hemisphere, to the Common Law of England, on this interesting subject, as it is ingeniously expounded by Keeble, and approved by the twelve judges of that highly civilized and enlightened island. With this brief reference to so grave authorities, in support of what we have now to offer, we shall return to the matter of the narrative, fully trusting that its incidents will throw some additional light on a subject of so deep and so general concern.

Content waited respectfully until his father had taken his seat, and then perceiving that the venerable Puritan had no immediate inten-

tion of moving personally in the affair, he commenced the examination of his dependant as follows: opening the matter with a seriousness that was abundantly warranted by the gravity of the subject itself.

“Thou hast spoken of one met in the forest,” he said; “proceed with the purport of that interview, and tell us of what manner of man it was.”

Thus directly interrogated, Eben Dudley disposed himself to give a full and satisfactory answer. First casting a glance around, so as to embrace every curious and eager countenance, and letting his look rest a little longer than common on a half-interested, half-incredulous, and a somewhat ironical dark eye, that was rivetted on his own from a distant corner of the room, he commenced his statement as follows:—

“It is known to you all,” said the borderer, “that when we had gained the mountain top,

there was a division of our numbers, in such a fashion that each hunter should sweep his own range of the forest, in order that neither moose, deer, nor bear, might have reasonable chance of escape. Being of large frame, and it may be of swifter foot than common, the young captain saw fit to command Reuben Ring to flank one end of the line, and a man who is nothing short of him in either speed or strength, to do the same duty on the other. There was nothing particularly worthy of mention that took place on the flank I held, for the first two hours, unless, indeed, the fact, that three several times did I fall upon a maze of well beaten deer tracks, that as often led to nothing—”

“ These are signs common to the woods, and they are no more than so many proofs that the animal has its sports, like any other playful creature, when not pressed by hunger or by danger,” quietly observed Content.

“ I pretend not to take those deceitful tracks much into the account,” resumed Dudley ; “ but shortly after losing the sound of the conchs, I roused a noble buck, from his lair beneath a thicket of hemlocks, and having the game in view, the chase led me wide-off towards the wilderness, it may have been the distance of two leagues.”

“ And in all that time had you no fitting moment to strike the beast ?”

“ None whatever ; nor, if opportunity had been given, am I bold to say, that hand of mine would have been hardy enough to aim at its life.”

“ Was there aught in the deer that a hunter should seek to spare it ?”

“ There was that in the deer that might bring a christian man to much serious reflection.”

“ Deal more openly with the nature and appearance of the animal,” said Content, a little

less tranquil than usual ; while the youths and maidens placed themselves in attitudes still more strongly denoting attention.

Dudley pondered an instant, and then he commenced a less equivocal enumeration of what he conceived to be the marvels of his tale.

“ Firstly,” he said, “ there was no trail, neither to nor from the spot where the creature had made its lair ; secondly, when roused, it took not the alarm, but leaped, sportingly, ahead ; taking sufficient care to be beyond the range of musket, without ever becoming hid from the eye ; and, lastly, its manner of disappearance was as worthy of mention, as any other of its movements.”

“ And in what manner didst thou lose the creature ?”

“ I had gotten it upon the crest of a hillock, where true eye and steady hand might make sure of a buck of much smaller size, when—— didst hear aught that might be accounted won-

derful, at a season of the year when the snows are still lying on the earth?"

The auditors regarded one another curiously, each endeavouring to recall some unwonted sound, which might sustain a narrative that was fast obtaining the seducing interest of the marvellous.

"Wast sure, Clarity, that the howl we heard from the forest was the yell of the beaten hound?" demanded a handmaiden of Ruth, of a blue-eyed companion, who seemed equally well disposed to contribute her share of evidence in support of any exciting legend.

"It might have been other," was the answer; "though the hunters do speak of their having beaten the pup for restiveness."

"There was a tumult among the echoes, that sounded like the noises which follow the uproar of a falling tree," said Ruth, thoughtfully. "I remember to have asked if it might not be, that some fierce beast had caused a

general discharge of the musketry; but my father was of opinion that death had undermined some heavy oak."

"At what hour might this have happened?"

"It was past the turn of the day; for it was at the moment I bethought me of the hunger of those who had toiled since light in the hills."

"That, then, was the sound I mean. It came not from falling tree, but was uttered in the air, far above all forests. Had it been heard by one better skilled in the secrets of nature—"

"He would say it thundered," interrupted Faith Ring, who, unlike most of the other listeners, manifested little of the quality which was expressed by her name. "Truly, Eben Dudley hath done marvels in this hunt; he hath come in with a thunderbolt in his head, instead of a fat buck on his shoulders!"

"Speak reverently, girl, of that thou dost

not comprehend," said Mark Heathcote, with stern authority. "Marvels are manifested, equally, to the ignorant and to the learned; and although vain-minded pretenders to philosophy affirm, that the warring of the elements is no more than nature working out its own purification, yet do we know, from all ancient authorities, that other manifestations are therein exhibited. Satan may have control over the magazines of the air; he can let off the ordnance of Heaven. That the prince of the powers of darkness hath as good a share in Chemistry as goes to the making of aurum fulminans, is asserted by one of the wisest writers of our age."

From this declaration, and more particularly from the learning discovered in the Puritan's speech, there was no one so hardy as to dissent. Faith was glad to shrink back among the bevy of awe-struck maidens, while Content, after a sufficiently respectful pause, invited the woods-

man, who was yet teeming with the most important part of his communication, to proceed.

“While my eye was searching for the lightning, which should in reason have attended that thunder, had it been uttered in the manner of nature, the buck had vanished; and when I rushed upon the hillock, in order to keep the game in view, a man mounting its opposite side came so suddenly upon me, that our muskets were at each other’s breasts before either had time for speech.”

“What manner of man was he?”

“So far as human judgment might determine, he seemed a traveller, who was endeavouring to push through the wilderness, from the towns below, to the distant settlements of the Bay Province; but I account it exceeding wonderful, that the trail of a leaping buck should have brought us together in so unwonted a manner!”

“And didst thou see aught of the deer after that encounter?”

“In the first hurry of the surprise, it did certainly appear as if an animal were bounding along the wood into a distant thicket; but it is known how readily one may be led by seeming probabilities into a false conclusion, and so I account that glimpse as delusion. No doubt, the animal having done that which it was commissioned to perform, did then and there disappear, in the manner I have named.”

“It might have been thus. And the stranger—had you discourse with him before parting?”

“We tarried together a short hour. He related much marvellous matter of the experiences of the people near the sea. According to the testimony of the stranger, the powers of darkness have been manifested in the provinces in a hideous fashion. Numberless of the believers have been persecuted by the invisibles, and greatly have they endured suffering, both in soul and body.”

“Of all this have I witnessed surprising

instances, in my day," said Mark Heathcote, breaking the awful stillness that succeeded the annunciation of so heavy a visitation on the peace of the colony, with his deep-toned and imposing voice. "Did he, with whom you conferred, enter into the particulars of the trials?"

"He spoke also of certain other signs, that are thought to foretell the coming of trouble. When I named the weary chase that I had made, and the sound which came from the air, he said that these would be accounted trifles in the towns of the Bay, where the thunder and its lightnings had done much evil work, the past season; Satan having especially shown his spite, by causing them to do injury to the houses of the Lord."

"There has long been reason to think, that the pilgrimage of the righteous into these wilds will be visited by some fierce opposition of those envious natures, which, fostering evil

themselves, cannot brook to look upon the toiling of such as strive to keep the narrow path. We will now resort to the only weapon it is permitted us to wield in this controversy, but which, when handled with diligence and zeal, never fails to lead to victory."

So saying, without waiting to hear more of the tale of Eben Dudley, old Mark Heathcote arose, and assuming the upright attitude usual among the people of his sect, he addressed himself to prayer. The grave and awe-struck, but deeply confiding congregation, imitated his example, and the lips of the Puritan had parted in the act of utterance, when a low, faltering note, like that produced by a wind instrument, rose on the outer air, and penetrated to the place where the family was assembled. A conch was suspended at the postern, in readiness to be used by any of the family whom accident or occupation should detain beyond the usual hour of closing the gates: and, both

by the direction and nature of this interruption, it would seem that an applicant for admission stood at the portal. The effect on the auditors was general and instantaneous. Notwithstanding the recent dialogue, the young men involuntarily sought their arms, while the startled females huddled together like a flock of trembling and timid deer.

“ There is, of a certainty, a signal from without !” Content at length observed, after waiting to suffer the sounds to die away among the angles of the buildings. “ Some hunter, who hath strayed from his path, claimeth hospitality.”

Eben Dudley shook his head like one who dissented ; but, having with all the other youths grasped his musket, he stood as undetermined as the rest concerning the course it was proper to pursue. It is uncertain how long this indecision might have continued, had no further summons been given ; but he without appeared

too impatient of delay to suffer much time to be lost. The conch sounded again, and with far better success than before. The blast was longer, louder, and bolder than that which had first pierced the walls of the dwelling, rising full and rich on the air; as though one well practised in the use of the instrument had placed lips to the shell.

Content would scarcely have presumed to disobey a mandate coming from his father, had it been little in conformity with his own intentions. But second thoughts had already shown him the necessity of decision, and he was in the act of motioning to Dudley and Reuben Ring to follow, when the Puritan bade him look to the matter. Making a sign for the rest of the family to remain where they were, and arming himself with a musket which had more than once that day been proved to be of certain aim, he led the way to the postern which has already been so often mentioned.

“Who sounds at my gate?” demanded Content, when he and his followers had gained a position, under cover of a low, earthen mound, erected expressly for the purpose of commanding the entrance; “who summons a peaceful family, at this hour of the night to their outer defences?”

“One who hath need of what he asketh, or he would not disturb thy quiet,” was the answer. “Open the postern, Master Heathcote, without fear; it is a brother in the faith, and a subject of the same laws that asketh the boon.”

“Here is truly a christian man, without,” said Content, hurrying to the postern; which, without a moment’s delay he threw freely open, saying, as he did so, “Enter, of Heaven’s mercy, and be welcome to that we have to bestow.”

A tall, and, by his tread, a heavy man, wrapped in a riding cloak, bowed to the greeting, and immediately passed beneath the low lintel.

Every eye was keenly fastened on the stranger, who, after ascending the acclivity a short distance, paused, while the young men, under their master's orders, carefully and scrupulously renewed the fastenings of the gate. When bolts and bars had done their office, Content joined his guest, and after making another fruitless effort, by the feeble light which fell from the stars, to scan his person, he said, in his own meek and quiet manner—

“Thou must have great need of warmth and nourishment. The distance from this valley to the nearest habitation is wearisome, and one who hath journeyed it, in a season like this, may well be nigh fainting. Follow, and deal with that we have to bestow as freely as if it were thine own.”

Although the stranger manifested none of that impatience, which the heir of the Wish-Ton-Wish appeared to think one so situated might in all reason feel, thus invited he did not

hesitate to comply. As he followed in the footsteps of his host, his tread, however, was leisurely and dignified: and once or twice, when the other half delayed in order to make some passing observation of courtesy, he betrayed no indiscreet anxiety to enter on those personal indulgencies, which might in reality prove so grateful to one who had journeyed far in an inclement season, and along a road where neither dwelling nor security invited repose.

“Here is warmth and a peaceful welcome,” pursued Content, ushering his guest into the centre of a group of fearfully anxious faces: “in a little time other matters shall be added to thy comfort.”

When the stranger found himself under the glare of a powerful light, and confronted to so many curious and wondering eyes, for a single instant he hesitated. Then stepping calmly forward, he cast the short riding cloak, which had closely muffled his features from his shoulders,

and discovered the severe eye, the stern lineaments, and the athletic form of him, who had once before been known to enter the doors of Wish-Ton-Wish with little warning, and to have quitted them so mysteriously.

The Puritan had arisen, with quiet and grave courtesy, to receive his visiter; but obvious, powerful, and extraordinary interest gleamed about his usually subdued visage, when, as the features of the other were exposed to view, he recognized the person of the man who advanced to meet him.

“Mark Heathcote,” said the stranger, “my visit is to thee. It may, or it may not, prove longer than the last, as thou shalt receive my tidings. Affairs of the last moment demand that there should be little delay in hearing that which I have to offer.”

Notwithstanding the excess and nature of the surprise which the veteran Mark had certainly betrayed, it endured just long enough to allow

those wondering eyes, which were eagerly devouring all that passed, to note its existence. Then the subdued and characteristic manner, which in general marked his air, instantly returned, and with a quiet gesture, like that which friends use in moments of confidence and security, he beckoned to the other to follow to an inner room. The stranger complied, making a slight bow of recognition to Ruth, as he passed her on the way to the apartment chosen for an interview, that was evidently intended to be private.

CHAPTER X.

Mar.—Shall I strike at it with my partizan ?

Hor.—Do, if it will not stand.

Ber.—'Tis here !

Hor.—'Tis here !

Mar.—'Tis gone !

Hamlet.

THE time that this unexpected visiter stood uncloaked and exposed to recognition, before the eyes of the curious group in the outer room, did not much exceed a minute. Still it was long enough to allow men who rarely overlooked the smallest peculiarity of dress or air.

to note some of the more distinguishing accompaniments of his attire. The heavy horseman's pistols, once before exhibited, were in his girdle, and young Mark got a glimpse of a silver-handled dagger which had pleased his eye before that night. But the passage of his grandfather and the stranger from the room, prevented the boy from determining whether it was entirely of the same fashion as that which, rather as a memorial of by-gone scenes than for any service that it might now be expected to perform, hung above the bed of the former.

“The man hath not yet parted with his arms!” exclaimed the quick-sighted youth, when he found that every other tongue continued silent. “I would he may now leave them with my grandfather, that I may chase the skulking Wompanoag to his hiding—”

“Hot-headed boy! Thy tongue is too much given to levity,” said Ruth, who had not only resumed her seat, but the light employment that

had been interrupted by the blast at the gate, with a calmness of mien that did not fail in some degree to re-assure her maidens. “Instead of cherishing the lessons of peace that are taught thee, thy unruly thoughts are ever bent on strife.”

“Is there harm in wishing to be armed with a weapon suited to my years, that I may do service in beating down the power of our enemies ; and perhaps aid something, too, in affording security to my mother !”

“Thy mother hath no fears,” returned the matron, gravely, while grateful affection prompted a kind but furtive glance towards the high-spirited though sometimes froward lad. “Reason hath already taught me the folly of alarm, because one has knocked at our gate in the night season. Lay aside thy arms, men ; you see that my husband no longer clings to the musket. Be certain that his eye will give us warning, when there shall be danger at hand.”

The unconcern of her husband was even more strikingly true than the simple language of his wife would appear to convey. Content had not only laid aside his weapon, but he had resumed his seat near the fire, with an air as calm, as assured, and, it might have seemed to one watchfully observant, as understanding as her own. Until now, the stout Dudley had remained leaning on his piece, immovable and apparently unconscious as a statue. But following the injunctions of one he was accustomed to obey, he placed the musket against the wall, with the care of a hunter, and then running a hand through his shaggy locks, as though the action might quicken ideas that were never remarkably active, he bluntly exclaimed—

“ An armed hand is well in these forests, but an armed heel is not less wanting, to him who would push a roadster from the Connecticut to the Wish-Ton-Wish, between a rising and a setting sun ! The stranger no longer journeys

in the saddle, as is plain by the sign that his boot beareth no spur. When he worried, by dint of hard pricking, the miserable hack that proved food for the wolves, through the forest, he had better appointments. I saw the bones of the animal no later than this day. They have been polished by fowls and frost, till the driven snow of the mountains is not whiter !”

Meaning and uneasy, but hasty glances of the eye were exchanged between Content and Ruth, as Eben Dudley thus uttered the thoughts which had been suggested by the unexpected return of the stranger.

“ Go you to the look-out at the western palisades,” said the latter ; “ and see if perchance the Indian may not be lurking near the dwellings, ashamed of his delay, and perchance fearful of calling us to his admission. I cannot think that the child means to desert us with no sign of kindness, and without leave-taking.”

“ I will not take upon me to say how much, or how little of ceremony the youngster may fancy to be due to the master of the valley and his kin; but if not gone already, the snow will not melt more quietly in the thaw, than the lad will one day disappear. Reuben Ring, thou hast an eye for light or darkness; come forth with me, that no sign escape us. Should thy sister, Faith, make one of our party, it would not be easy for the red-skin to pass the clearing without a hail.”

“ Go to,” hurriedly answered the female; “ it is more womanly that I tarry to see to the wants of him who hath journeyed far and hard since the rising of the sun. If the boy pass thy vigilance, wakeful Dudley, he will have little cause to fear that of others.”

Though Faith so decidedly declined to make one of the party, her brother complied without reluctance. The young men were about to

quit the place together; when the latch, on which the hand of Dudley was already laid, rose quietly without aid from his finger, the door opened, and the object of their intended search glided past them, and took his customary position in one of the more retired corners of the room. There was so much of the ordinary noiseless manner of the young captive in this entrance, that for a moment they who witnessed the passage of his dark form across the apartment, were led to think the movement no more than the visit he was always permitted to make at that hour. But recollection soon came, and with it not only the suspicious circumstance of his disappearance, but the inexplicable manner of his admission within the gates.

“The pickets must be looked to!” exclaimed Dudley, the instant a second look assured him that his eyes in truth beheld him who had been missing. “The place that a stripling can scale might well admit a host.”

“Truly,” said Content, “this needeth explanation. Hath not the boy entered when the gate was opened for the stranger? Here cometh one that may speak to the fact!”

“It is so,” said the individual named, who re-entered from the inner room in season to hear the nature of the remark. “I found this native child near thy gate, and took upon me the office of a christian man to bid him welcome. Certain am I, that one, kind of heart and gently disposed, like the mistress of this family, will not turn him away in anger.”

“He is no stranger at our fire, or at our board,” said Ruth; “had it been otherwise, thou wouldst have done well.”

Eben Dudley looked incredulous. His mind had been powerfully exercised that day with visions of the marvellous, and, of a certainty, there was some reason to distrust the manner in which the re-appearance of the youth had been made.

“It will be well to look to the fastenings,” he muttered, “lest others, less easy to dispose of, should follow. Now that invisible agencies are at work in the colony, one may not sleep too soundly !”

“Then go thou to the look-out, and keep the watch till the clock shall strike the hour of midnight,” said the Puritan, who uttered the command in a manner to shew that he was in truth moved by considerations far deeper than the vague apprehensions of his dependant. “Ere sleep overcome thee, another shall be ready for the relief.”

Mark Heathcote seldom spoke, but respectful silence permitted the lowest of his syllables to be audible. On the present occasion, when his voice was first heard, such a stillness came over all in presence, that he finished the sentence amid the nearly imperceptible breathings of the listeners. In this momentary but death-like quiet, there arose a blast from the conch at the

gate, that might have seemed an echo of that which had so lately startled the already excited inmates of the dwelling. At the repetition of sounds so unwonted all sprang to their feet, but no one spoke. Content cast a hurried and inquiring glance at his father, who in his turn had anxiously sought the eye of the stranger. The latter stood firm and unmoved. One hand was clenched upon the back of the chair from which he had arisen, and the other grasped, perhaps unconsciously, the handle of one of those weapons which had attracted the attention of young Mark, and which still continued thrust through the broad leathern belt, that girded his doublet.

“The sound is like that which one little used to deal with earthly instruments might raise,” muttered one of those whose mind had been prepared by the narrative of Dudley, to believe in any thing marvellous.

“Come from what quarter it may, it is a

summons that must be answered," returned Content. "Dudley, thy musket; this visit is so unwonted, that more than one hand should do the office of porter."

The borderer instantly complied, muttering between his teeth, as he shook the priming deeper into the barrel of his piece, "Your oversea gallants are quick on the trail to-night!" Then throwing the musket into the hollow of his arm, he cast a look of discontent and resentment towards Faith Ring, and was about to open the door for the passage of Content, when another blast arose on the silence without. The second touch of the shell was firmer, longer, louder, and more true than that by which it had just been preceded.

"One mighty fancy the conch was speaking in mockery," observed Content, looking with meaning towards their guest. "Never did sound more resemble sound than these we have

just heard, and those thou drew from the shell when asking admission."

A sudden light appeared to break in upon the intelligence of the stranger. Advancing more into the circle, rather with the freedom of long familiarity than with the diffidence of a newly arrived guest, he motioned for silence, as he said—

"Let none move, but this stout woodsman, the young captain, and myself. We will go forth, and doubt not that the safety of those within shall be regarded."

Notwithstanding the singularity of this proposal, at it appeared to excite neither surprise nor opposition in the Puritan or his son, the rest of the family offered no objection. The stranger had no sooner spoken, than he advanced near to the torch, and looked closely into the condition of his pistols. Then, turning to old Mark, he continued, in an under tone—

“Peradventure there will be more wordly strife than any which can flow from the agencies that stir up the unquiet spirits of the Colonies. In such an extremity, it may be well to observe a soldier’s caution.”

“I like not this mockery of sound,” returned the Puritan; “it augureth a taunting and fiend-like temper. We have of late had in this colony tragical instances of what the disappointed malice of Azazel can attempt, and it would be vain to hope that the evil agencies are not vexed with the sight of my Bethel.”

Though the stranger listened to the words of his host with respect, it was plain that his thoughts dwelt on dangers of a different character. The member that still rested on the handle of his weapon was clenched with greater firmness, and a grim, though a melancholy, expression was seated about a mouth, that was compressed in a manner to denote the physical rather than the spiritual resolution of the man.

He made a sign to the two companions he had chosen, and led the way to the court.

By this time, the shades of night had materially thickened, and, although the hour was still early, a darkness had come over the valley that rendered it difficult to distinguish objects at any distance from the eye. The obscurity made it necessary that they, who now issued from the door of the dwelling, should advance with caution, lest, ere properly admonished of its presence, their persons should be exposed to some lurking danger. When the three, however, were safely established behind the thick curtain of plank and earth that covered and commanded the entrance, and where their persons, from the shoulders downward, were completely protected, alike from shot and arrow, Content demanded to know who applied at his gates for admission at an hour when they were habitually closed for the night? Instead of receiving, as before, a ready answer, the silence was so profound, that

his own words were very distinctly heard repeated, as was not uncommon at that quiet hour, among the recesses of the neighbouring woods.

“Come it from devil, or come it from man, here is treachery !” whispered the stranger, after a fitting pause. “Artifice must be met by artifice ; but thou art much abler to advise against the wiles of the forest, than one trained, as I have been, in the less cunning deceptions of Christian warfare.”

“What thinkst, Dudley ?” asked Content—
“will it be well to sally, or shall we wait another signal from the conch ?”

“Much dependeth on the quality of the guests expected,” returned he of whom counsel was asked. “As for the braggart gallants, that are over valiant among the maidens, and heavy of heart when they think the screech of the jay an Indian whoop, I care not if ye beat the picquets to the earth, and call upon them to

enter on the gallop. I know the manner to send them to the upper story of the block quicker than the cluck of the turkey can muster its young ; but—”

“ ’Tis well to be discreet in language, in a moment of such serious uncertainty,” interrupted the stranger ; “ we look for no gallants of the kind.”

“ Then will I give you a conceit that shall know the reason of the music of yon conch. Go ye two back into the house, making much conversation by the way, in order that any without may hear. When ye have entered, it shall be my task to find such a post nigh the gate, that none shall knock again, and no porter be at hand to question them in the matter of their errand.”

“ This soundeth better,” said Content ; “ and that it may be done with all safety, some others of the young men, who are accustomed to this species of artifice, shall issue by the secret door,

and lie in wait behind the dwellings, in order that support shall not be wanting in case of violence. Whatever else thou dost, Dudley, remember that thou dost not undo the fastenings of the postern."

"Look to the support," returned the woodsman; "should it be keen-eyed Reuben Ring, I shall feel none the less certain that good aid is at my back. The whole of that family are quick of wit and ready of invention, unless it may be the wight who hath got the form without the reason of a man."

"Thou shalt have Reuben, and none other of his kin," said Content. "Be well advised of the fastenings, and so I wish thee all fitting success, in a deception that cannot be sinful, since it aims only at our safety."

With this injunction, Content and the stranger left Dudley to the practice of his own devices, the former observing the precaution to speak aloud while returning, in order that any

listeners without might be led to suppose the whole party had retired from the search, satisfied of its fruitlessness.

In the mean time, the youth left nigh the postern, set about the accomplishment of the task he had undertaken, in sober earnest. Instead of descending in a direct line to the palisadoes, he also ascended, and made a circuit among the out-buildings on the margin of the acclivity. Then bending so low as to blend his form with objects on the snow, he gained an angle of the palisadoes, at a point remote from the spot he intended to watch, and, as he hoped, aided by the darkness of the hour and the shadows of the hill, completely protected from observation. When beneath the palisadoes the sentinel crouched to the earth, creeping with extreme caution along the timber which united their lower ends, until he found himself arrived at a species of sentry box, that was erected for the very purpose to which he now intended it

should be applied. Once within the cover of this little recess, the sturdy woodsman bestowed his large frame, with as much attention to comfort and security as the circumstances would permit. Here he prepared to pass many weary minutes before there should be further need of his services.

The reader will find no difficulty in believing that one of opinions like those of the borderer, did not enter on his silent watch without much distrust of the character of the guests that he might be called upon to receive. Enough has been shewn to prove that the suspicion uppermost in his mind was, that the unwelcome agents of the government had returned on the heels of the stranger. But notwithstanding the seeming probability of this opinion, there were secret misgivings of the earthly origin of the two last windings of the shell. All the legends, and all the most credited evidence in cases of prestigious

agency, as it had been exhibited in the colonies of New England, went to show the malignant pleasure the evil spirits found, in indulging their wicked mockeries, or in otherwise tormenting those who placed their support on a faith that was believed to be so repugnant to their own ungrateful and abandoned natures. Under the impressions naturally excited by the communication he had held with the traveller in the mountains, Eben Dudley found his mind equally divided between the expectation of seeing, at each moment, one of the men whom he had induced to quit the valley so unceremoniously, returning to obtain, surreptitiously, admission within the gate, or of being made an unwilling witness of some wicked manifestation of that power, which was temporarily committed to the invisibles. In both of these expectations, however, he was fated to be disappointed. Notwithstanding the strong spiritual bias of

the opinions of the credulous sentinel, there was too much of the dross of temporal things in his composition, to elevate him altogether above the weakness of humanity. A mind so incumbered began to weary with its own contemplations, and, as it grew feeble with its extraordinary efforts, the dominion of matter gradually resumed its sway. Thought, instead of being clear and active, as the emergency would have seemed to require, began to grow misty. Once or twice the borderer half arose, and appeared to look about him with observation; and then, as his large frame fell heavily back into its former semi-recumbent attitude, he grew tranquil and stationary. This movement was several times repeated, at intervals of increasing length, till, at the end of an hour, forgetting alike the hunt, the troopers, and the mysterious agents of evil, the young man yielded to the fatigue of the day. The tall oaks of the adjoining forest

stood not more immovable in the quiet of the tranquil hour, than his frame now leaned against the side of its narrow habitation.

How much time was thus lost in inactivity, Eben Dudley could never precisely tell. He always stoutly maintained it could not have been long, since his watch was not disturbed by the smallest of those sounds from the woods, which sometimes occur in deep night, and which may be termed the breathing of the forest in its slumbers. His first distinct recollection, was that of feeling a hand grasped with the power of a giant. Springing to his feet, the young man eagerly stretched forth an arm, saying, as he did so, in words sufficiently confused—

“If the buck hath fallen by a shot in the head, I grant him to be thine, Reuben Ring: but if struck in limb or body, I claim the venison for a surer hand.”

“Truly a very just division of the spoil,”

returned one in an under tone, and speaking as if sounds too loud might be dangerous. "Thou givest the head of the deer for a target to Reuben Ring, and keepest the rest of the creature to thine own uses."

"Who hath sent thee, at this hour, to the postern? Dost not know that there are thought to be strangers outlying in the fields?"

"I know that there are some, who are not strangers, in-lying on their watch!" said Faith Ring. "What shame would come upon thee, Dudley, did the Captain, and they who have been so strongly exercised in prayer within, but suspect how little care thou hast had of their safety, the while!"

"Have they come to harm? If the Captain hath held them to spiritual movements, I hope he will allow that nothing earthly hath passed this postern to disturb the exercise. As I hope to be dealt honestly by, in all matters

of character, I have not once quitted the gate, since the watch was set."

"Else wouldst thou be the famousest sleep-walker in the Connecticut Colony! Why, drowsy one, conch cannot raise a louder blast, than that thou soundest, when eyes are fairly shut in sleep. This may be watching according to thy meaning of the word; but infant, in its cradle, is not half so ignorant of that which passeth around it, as thou hast been."

"I think, Faith Ring, that thou hast gotten to be much given to back-biting, and evil saying against friends, since the visit of the gallants from over sea."

"Out upon the gallants from over sea, and thee too, man! I am not a girl to be flouted with bold speech from one, who doth not know whether he be sleeping or waking. I tell thee, thy good name would be lost in the family, did it come to the ears of the Captain, and more particularly to the knowlege of that-

soldier stranger, up in the dwelling, of whom even the Madam maketh so great ceremony, that thou hast been watching with a tuneful nose, an open mouth, and a sealed eye."

"If any but thee hadst said this slander of me, girl, it would go nigh to raise hot speech between us! Thy brother, Reuben Ring, knows better than to stir my temper, by such falsity of accusation."

"Thou dealest so generously by him, that he is prone to forget thy misdeeds. Truly he hath the head of the buck, while thou contentest thyself with the offals and all the less worthy parts! Go to, Dudley; thou wast in a heavy dream when I caused thee to awake."

"A pretty time have we fallen upon, when petticoats are used instead of beards and strong armed men, to go the rounds of the sentinels, and to say who sleepeth and who is watchful! What hath brought thee so far from the exercises and so nigh the gates, Mistress Faith, now

that there is no over-sea gallant to soothe thy ears with lying speech and light declarations."

"If speech not to be credited is that I seek," returned the girl, "truly the errand hath not been without its reward. What brought me hither, sooth! why, the Madam hath need of articles from the outer buttery—and—ay—and my ears led me to the postern. Thou knowest, musical Dudley, that I have had occasion to hearken to thy watchful notes before this night. But my time is too useful to be wasted in idleness; thou art now awake, and may thank her, who hath done thee a good turn with no wish to boast of it, that one of a black beard is not the laughing stock of all the youths in the family. If thou keepest thine own counsel, the Captain may yet praise thee for a vigilant sentinel; though Heaven forgive him the wrong he will do the truth!"

"Perhaps a little anger at unjust suspicions may have prompted more than the matter need-

ed, Faith, when I taxed thee with the love of backbiting, and I do now recal that word. Though I will ever deny that aught more, than some wandering recollection concerning the hunt of this day, hath come over my thoughts, and perhaps made me even forgetful that it was needful to be silent at the postern ; and therefore, on the truth of a christian man, I do forgive thee, the—”

But Faith was already out of sight and out of hearing. Dudley himself, who began to have certain prickings of conscience concerning the ingratitude he had manifested to one who had taken so much interest in his reputation, now bethought him seriously of that which remained to be done. He had much reason to suspect, that there was less of the night before him than he had at first believed, and he became in consequence more sensible of the necessity of making some report of the events of his watch. Accordingly he cast a scrutinizing

glance around, in order to make sure that the facts should not contradict his testimony, and then, first examining the fastenings of the postern, he mounted the hill, and presented himself before the family. The members of the latter, having in truth passed most of the long interval of his absence in spiritual exercises, and in religious conversation, were not so sensible of his delay in reporting, as they might otherwise have been.

“What tidings dost thou bring us from without?” said Content, so soon as the self-relieved sentinel appeared. “Hast seen any, or hast heard that which is suspicious?”

Ere Dudley would answer, his eye did not fail to study the half-malicious expression of the countenance of her who was busy in some domestic toil, directly opposite to the place where he stood. But reading there no more than a glance of playful though smothered irony, he was encouraged to proceed in his report.

“The watch has been quiet,” was the answer; “and there is little cause to keep the sleepers longer from their beds. Some vigilant eyes, like those of Reuben Ring and my own, had better be open until the morning; further than that, is there no reason for being wakeful.”

Perhaps the borderer would have dwelt more at large on his own readiness to pass the remainder of the hours of rest, in attending to the security of those who slept, had not another wicked glance from the dark, laughing eye of her who stood so favourably placed to observe his countenance, admonished him of the prudence of being modest in his professions.

“This alarm hath then happily passed away,” said the Puritan, arising. “We will now go to our pillows in thankfulness and peace. Thy service shall not be forgotten, Dudley; for thou hast exposed thyself to seeming danger, at least, in our behalf.”

“That hath he!” half-whispered Faith; “and sure am I, that we maidens will not forget his readiness to lose the sweets of sleep, in order that the feeble may not come to harm.”

“Speak not of the trifle,” hurriedly returned the other. “There has been some deception in the sounds, for it is now my opinion, except to summon us to the gate, that this stranger might enter—the conch hath not been touched at all to-night.”

“Then is it a deception which is repeated!” exclaimed Content, rising from his chair as a faint and broken blast from the shell, like that which had first announced their visiter, again struggled among the buildings, until it reached every ear in the dwelling.

“Here is warning as mysterious as it may prove portentous!” said old Mark Heathcote, when the surprise, not to say consternation, of the moment, had subsided. “Hast seen nothing that might justify this?”

Eben Dudley, like most of the auditors, was too much confounded to reply. All seemed to attend anxiously for the second and more powerful blast, which was to complete the imitation of the stranger's summons. It was not necessary to wait long, for in a time, as near as might be, to that which had intervened between the two first peals of the horn, followed another, and in a note so true, again, as to give it the semblance of an echo.

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